PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

SEPTEMBER 09

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 23 (September 2009)

Fast and Furious meets LittleBigPlanet

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

ModNation RACERS

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"9 out of 10"
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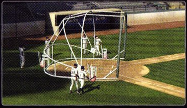

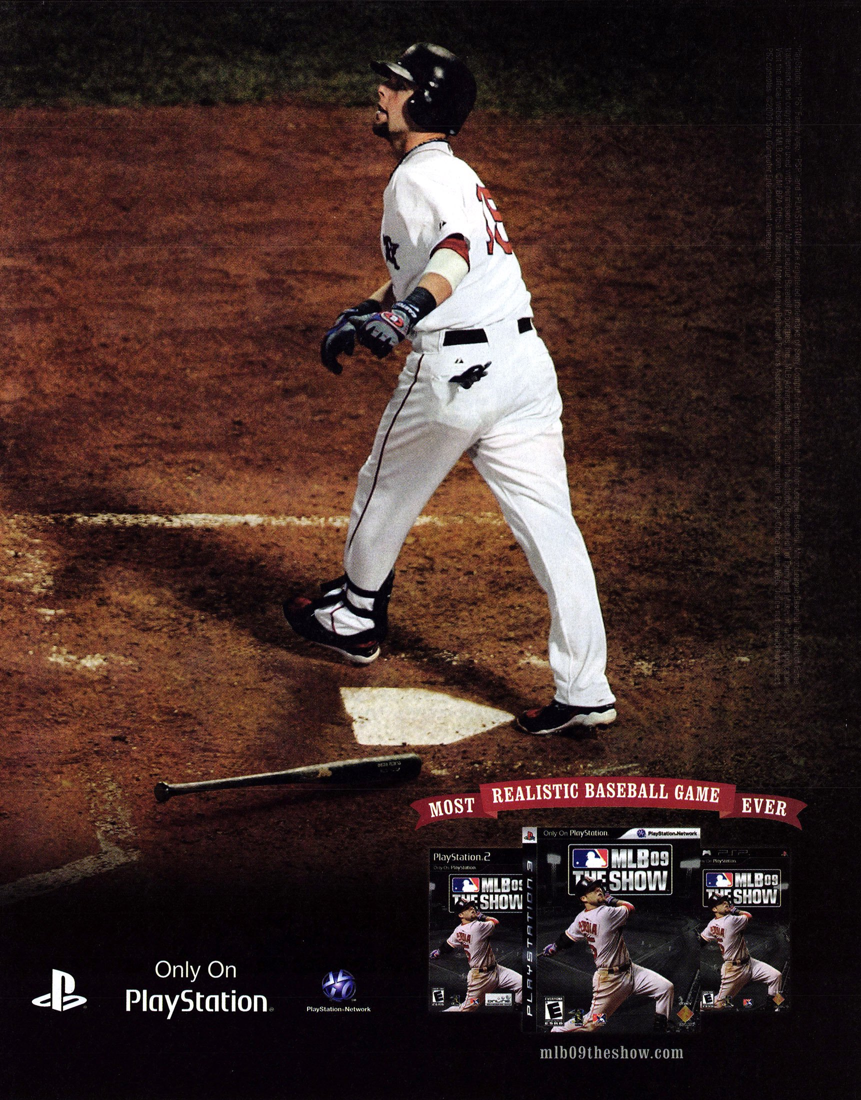
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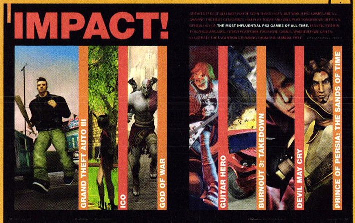

'IMPACT!
THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PS2 GAMES OF ALL-TIME,
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GOD OF WAR
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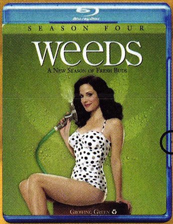

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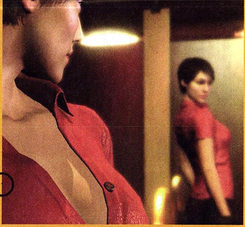

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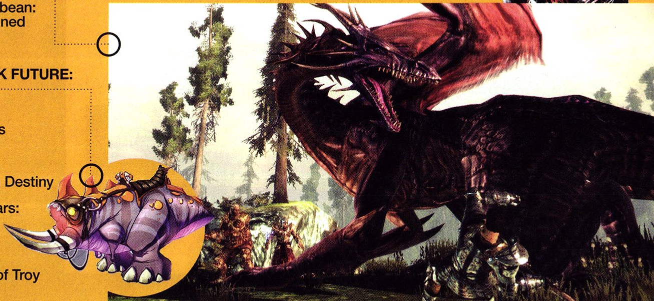
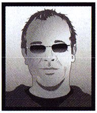




Editor's Note

"I tend to think of myself as a one-man wolf pack."

It was a pretty easy call. Take the play, create, share doctrine that powered *LittleBigPlanet's* surge to stardom and blend it with kart racing. Race, create, share. Yeah, we're in. After its reveal at E3 we knew you'd want more details on what start-up studio United Front was planning, so we dispatched Teresa to eke out everything the team would reveal. The method of driving your kart around the landscape to form the track, and then painting on the surrounding environment in broad brushstrokes appears incredibly intuitive, and Teresa put that theory to the test. You can read her report starting on page 50.

As we get so focused on the excitement surrounding the releases in the pipeline on PS3 it's easy to overlook the PlayStation 2's continuing position, and also its relevance to the games you're going to be playing in the coming months and years. We had Douglass Perry get out the genealogy charts and plot the relationship between some of the most influential games on PS2 and their bigger, better-looking PS3 brethren. Did we get it right? Let me know at PTOM_letters@futureus.com.

No doubt it's feeling better and better every month to be a PlayStation 3 owner. Right at press time *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* scooped the coveted Game Critics Awards Best of Show from E3, beating out some really impressive competition. So the best game we saw out of all those hundreds in LA in June is only on PS3. You've got to be pleased with that.

Rob

Oops

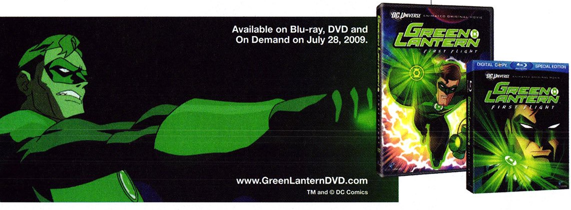
I believe this is the first Correction entry I've ever had to do in my years helming various videogame magazines. But boy, is it a doozy.

First, I'm writing this a little before the anticipated slew of emails telling us that *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is *not* coming to the PSPgo, as was mistakenly captioned on page 7 of the August issue. In the mad rush to get the very latest news from E3 into that issue we played a game of long distance telephone. A few garbled messages later and a big mistake. Our bad. Our apologies to Naughty Dog and SCEA for all the questions they had to field about our gaffe.

Second, the awesome-sauce *Bayonetta,* developed by PlatinumGames and to be published SEGA, was attributed to Capcom. Sincerest apologies to the dev team whose game has us so stoked we failed to notice the error. Please don't send her witch-ness after us. Though actually…

"Quote" contest

A special contest this month. Courtesy of our friends at Warner Bros. I have 10 copies of the new *Green Lantern* animated movie, *First Flight,* on Blu-ray to give away. Featuring a quality voice cast including John Larroquette, Michael Madsen, and Tricia Helfer, the story focuses on Green Lantern's mentor, Sinestro, and a potentially devastating conspiracy. If you don't know the drill, just identify the movie that the quote at the top of the page is lifted from, and send it in an email, along with your full mailing address, to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the words Ed Note September in the subject line. The winner of last month's contest, who identified the line from the great new *Star Trek* movie is Satnam Bains of San Jose, CA who will get a random Blu-ray movie from our cupboard of goodness!



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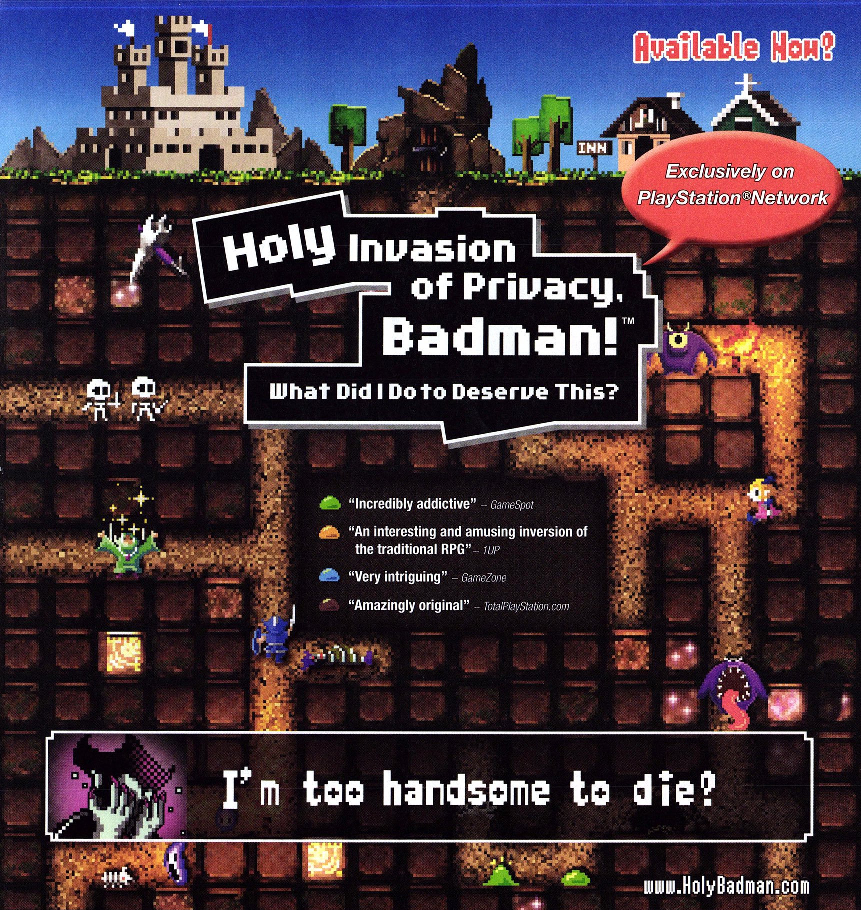
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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
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Animated Blood
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

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PlayStation Portable

PlayStation Network

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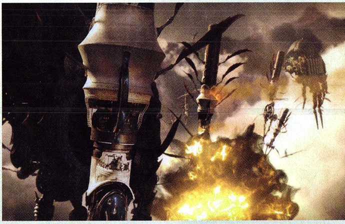
1 FINAL FANTASY XIV ONLINE

Take two at a *Final Fantasy* MMORPG

Raise your hand if you or someone you know played *Final Fantasy XI,* Square Enix's first *Final Fantasy* MMORPG. Okay, now raise your hand if you or your friends didn't, at some point in the experience of playing that game, want to ram your controller (or mouse) down someone's throat? That's what we thought. For all its strengths, *FFXI* was seriously flawed (see boxout).

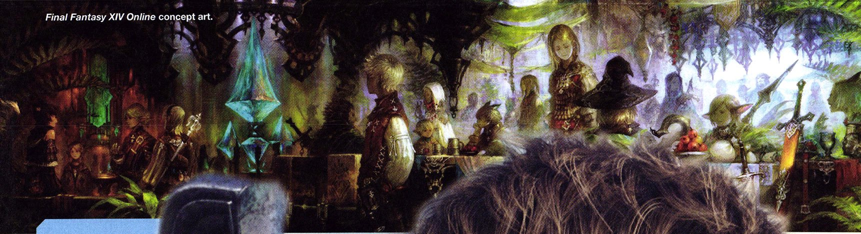
But now, Square Enix has a chance to build the persistent *Final Fantasy* universe that the ardent fanbase deserves. *Final Fantasy XIV Online* is set in a brand new world called Eorzea, and though some of the races and monsters will be siblings to the ones in *FFXI,* expect a good number of completely new critters. Taking inspiration from other popular MMORPGS (*cough* *World of Warcraft* *cough*), the team is building *FFXIV* to be more balanced—some exploration, some battling, some solo play, and some group play. They've also mentioned an overhauled level-up system that's not based on experience…and a whole new job system.

Okay, Square Enix, you've piqued our interest. Now, spill the details.



***FFXI* had airships that took you from city to city. But these flyers are in battle. Does that mean *FFXIV* will have playable air combat?**

The fibrous wings make this creature-thing look organic. But the metal fixings points to more mechanical origins. What could it be?



Final Fantasy XIV Online concept art.

MMdoh

The worst things about *FFXI* (Square, please fix these issues!)

- » **Dying** lost you a huge chunk of experience points—a four-hour session of grinding could leave you with less experience than when you started. How is that fair?
- » **A perfect party** was required, with the right roles and job classes, to perform even simple tasks. That meant *hours* of trying to find people to accompany you on a worm slaughtering fest.
- » **The insane economy!** Both the Japanese and U.S. versions were hosted on the same servers even though the Japanese version released a year earlier, which meant prices were highly inflated by the time we noobilicious English-speakers joined the fray.

MMoh yes!

The best things about *FFXI* (please, please, please keep these!)

- » **Quests and missions** were involving and well-presented, side characters were engaging, and we loved how turning in quests triggered cutscenes. The Star Onion Brigade quest line in Windurst was a fav.
- » **The flexible job system** allowed switching—say, from a tanking warrior to a magic-flingin' red mage—or add a sub-job to your main job. Your character wasn't chained to a single role, which allowed some freedom in making the persona unique.
- » **The skill chain system** made teamwork feel vital and real. If a party had enough synergy (which meant they used macros or voice chat), they could perform weapons skills one after another with extremely precise timing, which activated a powerful bonus attack. Successfully executing multiple skill chains meant your party had mad talent.

This Hume male looks familiar. We're guessing the other races will also be present in *FFXIV*: perky-eared Elvaan, sturdy Galka, feline Mithra, and adorable Tarutaru.

2 GLOBAL: SHU YOSHIDA

Sony's President of Worldwide Studios

The amiable Shu Yoshida has been a fixture in Sony's games division for years, and was recently head of U.S. development studios until his promotion to oversee worldwide development. With four platforms on the go—PlayStations 3, 2, Portable, and Network—that's a significant responsibility. After the announcement of PSPgo, the revelation of the motion controller, not to mention the slew of ambitious first-party titles in the works, the PlayStation well is running deep. We talked to Yoshida about the challenges that still lay ahead, and the potential still to be tapped across the range of products you'll be playing for the next several years.

PTOM: As we sit here three years into a 10-year cycle, what's your overall feel of what's been achieved so far, and are we where you envisioned we'd be at this point?
From the content standpoint you can see from the games we're releasing this year and next year that developers are getting much more comfortable with the hardware and taking more and more advantage of it. So I think we have come to the point that we're now confident in saying that we meant what we said when we launched PS3 that we had more hardware power [than other systems]. On the network side, we announced PlayStation Network with PS3, and obviously day one we didn't have too much content and too many services, but every year we're adding more and more content and our games are taking more and more advantage of the network capabilities.

So I almost feel like we're in the launch year of PlayStation 3 in terms of how we can differentiate it from the last generation. We're still at the starting point and we're still adding to our install base and we're looking to expand our user base. And we just added the motion controller to help broaden our reach.

Is there a particular strategy for the content on PSN, either casual or more features and functions to integrate social networking-style extras?
Yes, the big thing is how to grow communities around games. I think *LittleBigPlanet* did a great job of connecting people not just sharing content, but when your friend posts something you get a notification, just like in Facebook or other social networks. So that's an area we're very focused on, how to bring these features into our games.

"I almost feel like we're in the launch year of PlayStation 3..."

From a geography standpoint have you seen a shift in how developers are designing games across Japan, Europe, and North America?
I think clearly it was the Japanese development community that struggled initially to get a handle on the technology [of the PS3]. Part of that is because of the successful portable market in Japan. I see games now coming out, like *The Last Guardian, Gran Turismo,* and *Final Fantasy*, the Japanese teams really embracing this technology, and being really able to achieve their visions.

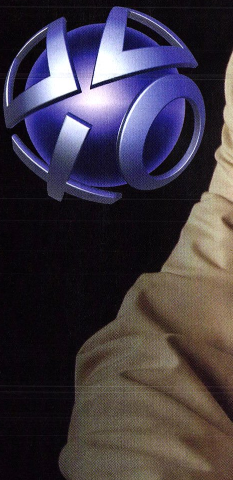
What were the overriding design decisions in what needed to be achieved with PSPgo?
Two major things: One is the pure size of it. By removing the UMD we've been able to make it really portable. The other is the digital side. Since we announced PSP there have been a lot of people who wanted game content on a memory stick to carry it, without carrying a lot of discs. So we tried to answer some of that with the network downloadable games, and converting some UMD games to download, but at the same time we realized that because of the form factor it's not easy to carry PSP around. So that's when we decided we needed to come up with this form factor.

In a new PSP a lot of people were clamoring for a second analog stick. What's the story?
It was a big argument for and against for obvious reasons. Against it is that we don't want to divide the platform, because so much content is already designed with one stick in mind. If we add a stick in the middle of the lifecycle, the creators have to make decisions on which platform to support. We've seen developers transfer second stick functions to buttons very successfully, so we didn't want to stop that.

When you make the stick available, because of the precise control it provides, it can make games [like *Resistance Retribution]* pretty easy, so you have to tweak all the difficulty settings and AI, so it's better to have the teams focus on just one platform.

Do you have projections on what the drop in the price of the PSP toolkit will do for the volume of content appearing on the platform?
The price drop of the development kit is closely related to the launch of PSPgo, because we want more and more independently produced content. There are a lot of small developers who are interested in working on PSP, but in talking to them the price of the hardware toolkit was one of the barriers.

Was it important to you personally that *Gran Turismo* appear on PSP?
Absolutely! Personally, as a company, as a fan of the IP, yes! The team is good at focusing on one title at a time and with the PS3 version in development they had to make a decision to do a PSP game for this year. It was a big decision for them and they had to go beyond their comfort area, but they saw that it was important for them to support the platform. They have



surprised themselves how good *Gran Turismo* is on PSP.

With *Metal Gear* continuing on PSP, was part of the strategy to ensure having all the major franchises represented on the platform?
Yes, over the last year we've had very, very focused effort between third and first party groups to produce and bring more content to PSP. Because of success of other platforms and other platforms available, third parties have reduced their amount of effort on PSP. But they have seen success on the platform, and I'm very happy that they've seen numbers go up.

Will Trophies ever be available for PSP games?
It's under discussion, but there are some technical challenges.

How important is the Bluetooth support in the PSPgo?
Well, if you think about it, your DualShock controller is also Bluetooth, so it presents possibilities to hook your PSPgo to your TV and control it using the controller. Another use is to connect your PSPgo to your cell phone so that it can become an always-on platform.

We saw motion control from Dr. Marks' team several years ago on PS2. Is this new technology an extension of that?
Yes, camera technology has been a focus of Dr. Marks' R&D team since the early days of PS2. A camera by itself is great, using hands or body to control things, but it needed more precision, so it needed upgraded sensor technology, and it has much finer precision than we have in the Sixaxis controller.

Will the games and software in the initial release of the motion controller be targeted towards the more casual audience?
Obviously we're looking at the ease of use of the motion controller to attract a broader audience, but when we work with this new technology, because it's so precise, we can see a lot of functions for more core gamers' games. Like a first-person shooter would be great, walking around a room, ducking and hiding. We're looking at all kinds of possibilities.

SONY
PSP
3
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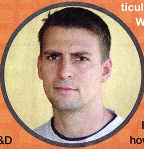
3 ON THE MOVE

Sony's new PS3 Motion Controller aims to keep the competition well in hand

The motion controller demonstration at Sony's E3 Press Conference in June was one of the highlights of the event and an impressive display of the technology's capabilities and its potential.



While SCEA hasn't yet allowed hands-on time with the prototype unit, PTOM did speak to **Dr. Richard Marks,** Sony's R&D Manager for Special Projects, who's heading up the controller's development.

PTOM: Will the initial batch of games that utilize the new motion controller be strictly first-party developed games? Or do third-party developers currently have access to the technology and development tools?
Dr. Marks: No, not strictly first party. Our first-party group will, of course, be well represented at launch, but key third parties already have access to prototype hardware and software.

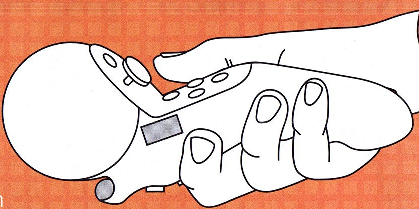
Will games have to be specifically developed for the new controller or will its functionality be integrated (at least to some extent) in all future PS3 games?
Developers will choose an appropriate control scheme for new games, and they may choose to support several modes of control, so that the games can be played, for example, either using the motion controller or the DualShock 3. We want to provide as much flexibility as possible for our game developers to be creative.

Is there any capability or application of the new controller that you find particularly tantalizing? What do *you* consider particularly "cool" and look forward to seeing implemented in a game?
There are many! I especially like how it feels as a sword, a wand, a gun, or a pen. It tracks very fast, and it gives such intuitive control that I think it will breathe new life into many well-established game genres. The new controller's high-precision embedded sensors detect the sensitive movements of the hands and with the combination of PSeye which tracks the sphere on the controller, the position of the controller in real-life 3D space can also be precisely detected. Our PS3 developers already have a good jump on exciting ways to use the new capabilities, so I know to expect great gaming experiences from them soon. Sports, action, puzzle, RPG, RTS, FPS; I suppose to be fair, I'm just going to have to play them all.

But of course, being a researcher, I get most excited about the crazy new things it will enable, and the guys in my group have a long list of intriguing new ideas to try out. One of my favorites reveals my childhood ambition to be a magician when I grew up. The idea is to use augmented reality (mixed graphics and video) and real-time special-effects technology to enable your own personal magic show. The new controller makes for a great magic wand, and the PSeye can detect and track faces in the live video, and the PSeye mic array can be used for speech recognition. With a new magic trick downloadable every month, I think there is no limit to the fun that would be possible.

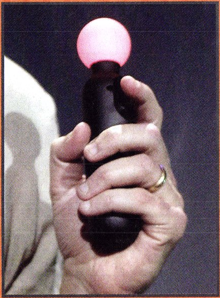
The new controller seems to occupy a middle ground between Nintendo's control system and Microsoft's Project Natal—offering more precise motion control capabilities while still retaining an actual physical control interface. Is this an accurate assessment and what design successes and failures led you to take this approach?
We learned a lot from our experience creating EyeToy. We learned that while people definitely enjoy physical interaction and movement, they also want precise control and a simple, fast, reliable way to trigger actions. We designed our motion control system to accomplish all of this.

We also learned from EyeToy the limitations for a camera-only interface. While there are definitely some benefits for a 3D camera, we did not feel it was the best solution *for games*. We looked very carefully down that path, and we chose to follow a different one. We believe the path we have chosen is not "a middle ground," but rather a superset. It is an ideal combination of both spatial and action/button input, and of course we can combine that with voice and video data from the PSeye mic array and camera.



Concept

2007: Technology patents filed



Prototype

June 2, 2009: SCEA E3 Press Conference demo

?

Product

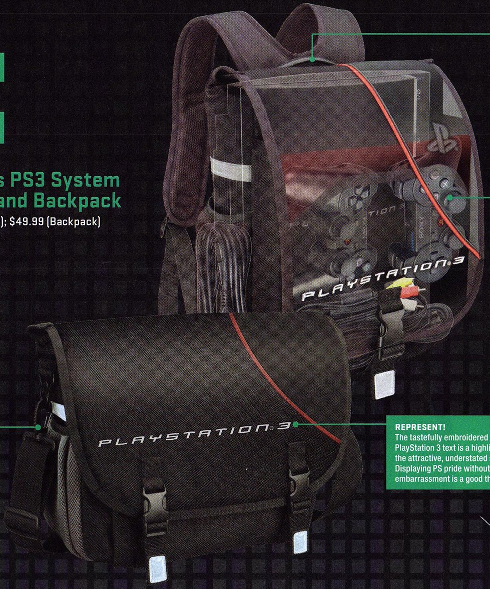
Spring 2010

4 HARDWARE

R.D.S. Industries PS3 System Messenger Bag and Backpack

MSRP: $59.99 (Messenger Bag); $49.99 (Backpack)
Website: No URL available

R.D.S. Industries' line of officially licensed PS3 system bags come in two styles: a messenger bag or a backpack. While the messenger bag is a bit larger and roomier, both styles will swallow the console, up to four controllers, and requisite cords with ease. You won't be able to carry your entire game collection, but you can squeeze in a couple games and accessories as well. The bags are nicely constructed, but the padding and hardware is better characterized as adequate rather than exceedingly robust.



HANDLE WITH CARE
While the shoulder straps are well-padded and feel quite sturdy, the carrying handle is a bit flimsy and doesn't inspire confidence.

GOOD TO GO
This cutaway perfectly illustrates how your PS3 console and peripherals fit into the backpack. While only two controllers are shown, the bag can expand to accommodate a couple more if needed.

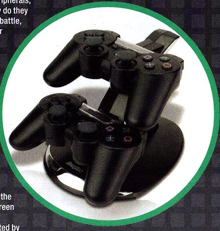
HARD-WEAR?
The mostly plastic strap hook is a point of concern for long-term durability. Considering the weight of the PS3 console, metal hardware would have been preferable. We'll update you if we encounter any problems over the long haul.

REPRESENT!
The tastefully embroidered PlayStation 3 text is a highlight of the attractive, understated styling. Displaying PS pride without embarrassment is a good thing.

Energizer Power & Play Charging System

MSRP: $29.99 | Website: www.pdp.com

Charging systems may not be the sexiest peripherals, but they are among the most useful. Not only do they keep your controllers ready and charged for battle, they also offer a convenient storage place for them until your next gaming session. All the units we've previously tested (Nyko's Charge Base and dreamGEAR's Quad Dock) worked as advertised, but each had little idiosyncrasies that didn't quite match our personal preferences: the Nyko required a dongle that attached to the controller and the Quad Dock's four unit capacity is about two more than we usually need. But the Energizer Power & Play system matched our needs perfectly (your needs may differ). It features two snug clamps that securely hold controllers and two built-in USB ports to charge additional controllers via cable should the need arise. The stylish design is another plus, but by far the biggest improvement is the muted red and green glow the unit emits while working—much more preferable than the blinding LEDs sported by the competition.



Pelican AfterGlow Pro Controller

MSRP: $22.99 | Website: www.pdp.com

If the AfterGlow Pro isn't the coolest controller you've ever seen, it can certainly lay claim to being the brightest. Available in hues of red, blue, green, and white, the lighted wired PS3 controller lacks the wireless, rumble, and Sixaxis capabilities of the DualShock 3, but makes up for it with a lower price point and unique form factor. The main difference is the unit's compact size, which makes it ideal for kids and players with small hands—simultaneous presses of multiple face buttons are particularly easy to execute. The L2 and R2 shoulder buttons also diverge from the standard controller design with a near-trigger shape that's an ergonomic improvement, but it does take time getting used to the difference in rebound and increased travel compared to the L1 and R1 buttons. The six-foot cord can also be problematic if you sit a significant distance from your PS3. But while the AfterGlow may never replace your primary controllers, it is novel and you could read a book by its bright light.

5 PSPgo OR NO?

It's official the PSPgo is a go! Twittering PTOM readers offer their initial reactions to the new portable system and its specs.

jaferris PSPgo looks gr8 will prob end up buying one but the price is way too high ATM hope it lowers closer to launch.

adamantlee I think it will be good for people who want to go pure digital downloads. I still like my old PSP with the UMDs, though.

DrDane I for one find the PSPgo one on the best reveals of E3!

argel319 The PSPgo looks like a great new way to take people's $250. That said, I'm gonna buy 2, like I bought 2 PSP Slims...

We asked SCEA about the future of UMDs. They responded that with the current PSP-3000 continuing to live alongside the new PSPgo, the UMD format remains a key component of their PSP strategy. Consumer research shows that many people still prefer purchasing games on tangible disc-based media, and they'll continue to serve this market segment.

uberlab the decision to omit the right analog stick again is lame...esp when the hardware form factor easily allows this.

PaperCoversRyan Very useful for those that are into digital media. But I personally feel indifferent. I'm happy with my 2000 model.

BlueHeeler75 I think the price needs to be more competitive to the DSi. The magic handheld price is under $175.

zllehs a handheld system for the hardcore gamer that has finally caught up with the tech of the 2nd half of this decade with DD [digital download].

bdabearsfan the key to the PSPgo will be sony's plan for existing UMD collections.

Galvanise Excited about the PSPgo! It's a bold move by Sony and a move I've wanted for a while. Couldn't be more chuffed.

aodific Even with the 16GB flash drive built in, the PSPgo should be less expensive due to the lack of UMD. I want physical games, not DLs.

pixelpractioner I'm excited. But, I'll reserve final judgment on hearing if the battery life is improved or just more of the same.

SCEA is "currently evaluating" the opportunity to support existing PSP [and UMD media] owners who upgrade to the PSPgo; more details will be announced leading up to the PSPgo's launch in October.

natalieroy kind of excited for PSPgo, tho wont be convinced til i see the umd program.

SensAzn Disappointed that it's missing a right analog stick, impressed that it's as small as an iphone.

GotEmRunnin nice tech; too much money at 249.99 when compared to whats out there, regardless of the IP's and companies supporting it.

spckeishou Excited, but still too early.

Follow the PTOM Twitter at Twitter.com/P_TOM.

SONY
PlayStation®Network
PlayStation®Store
PSP
SELECT
START

SCEA states that the PSPgo will offer battery life similar to the PSP-3000—three to six hours for gameplay and three to five hours for video playback.

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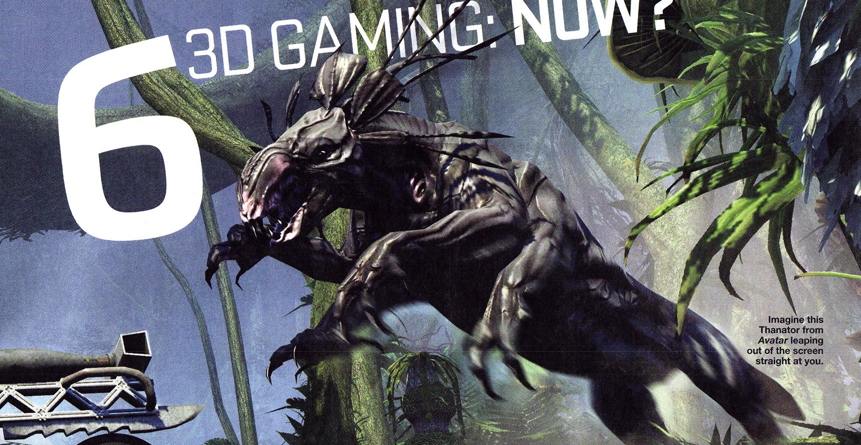
6 3D GAMING: NOW?



Imagine this Thanator from *Avatar* leaping out of the screen straight at you.

Movie theaters are abuzz with the latest tech trend pushed by Hollywood, but 3D interactivity will invade your living room in the months ahead. Are you ready?

You really want the blood, spit, and splatter from a *Fight Night* boxer's pummeled face leaping off the screen? Will swinging across deep chasms and grappling along high ledges in 3D induce as much nausea as it does exhilaration?

Like many of this summer's movie releases, Disney's *G-Force* movie is available for viewing in all-new 3D. It's an impressive visual effect theoretically putting you right in the middle of each scene (and hopefully not scaring the bejeebus out of the kiddies). The game (reviewed on page 80) lets you toggle the 3D effects on or off on any TV.

3D-enhanced entertainment is here right now, and videogames will be the next big stop after the movie theaters, so are you equipped?

What you need to know about 3D gaming:

→ The only games likely to showcase 3D support in the next year are movie tie-ins where it's a part of the big marketing push.

→ 3D images are basically an overlay of two images, each representing the input into an eye.

→ Virtually any TV can display a 3D image when it's hooked up to a PS3 and you're wearing the supplied glasses.

→ SCEA tells us that none of their games in development are currently planned to offer a 3D viewing option.

→ Some DLP TVs feature 3D compatibility but that technology has been gradually phased out as LCD/plasma prices drop (but check your model number specs if you were an early adopter.)

→ Unless you're dropping A-list Hollywood superstar-like money you'll be wearing glasses to get your 3D for many, many years.

→ What is A-list Hollywood superstar money? Guesstimates start at around $25,000—the price tipped for the first autostereoscopic HDTVs as and when they begin hitting the market in the next few years.

Avatar

The buzz is likely to be crazy when James Cameron's Next Big Thing lands in theaters this holiday. Little has been revealed so far about the plot and details, but both the movie and Ubisoft's attendant game will be presented in 3D.

Huge alien creatures are the perfect vehicle for showcasing the 3D technology. You just know you'll get a scene with one of them leaping straight at your face. Even if you're manning the mechanized armor (or Ampsuit), that Thanator beast should be all the scarier for being in 3D.

We expect the *Avatar* game—being developed under Pentagon-like security at Ubisoft's Montreal HQ—to showcase a new depth level of immersiveness as we meander through its stylish, colorful environments with branches, leaves, and projectiles all reaching out from the screen to touch us.

Auto-what?

Wearing 3D specs, even the polarized-style that are preferable to the paper red-and-blue-lensed cheapies, is a major turn-off for many people intrigued by this whole 3D thing.

Autostereoscopic technology is the process by which you can see a 3D image without glasses from multiple viewing points in the room. Smart fellas figuring out the processes have written papers on the theory for the past couple of years, but it was late 2008 when the first test TVs were produced to prove the concept.

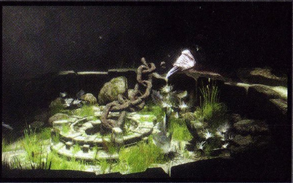
It could be as many as 10 years before the technology is perfected sufficiently for products to flood your local electronics emporium with new TV options (and it could be even longer before broadcast channels produce content to take advantage of the new technology).

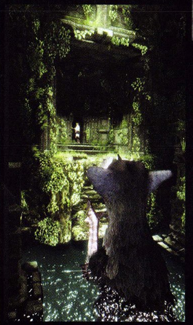
7

Team ICO's new sure-fire classic (probably)

What's *The Last Guardian?* We break it down

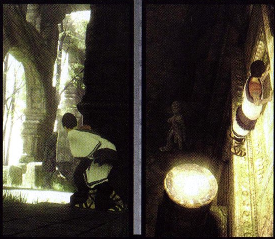
► It's the third game from Team ICO, the developers who crafted the beautifully simplistic *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus* for the PlayStation 2. Both games set straightforward, platforming-based gameplay in unusual locations—from a shadow-filled castle to the backs of colossi—and then through music, soft lighting, and light-handed storytelling, created experiences that captured the hearts of gamers and critics alike. We expect *The Last Guardian* to offer a similar experience… while making full use of the PS3's high definition prowess.



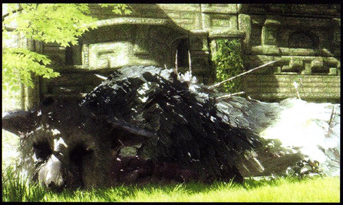


◄ Eventually, the boy will use the creature to solve platforming puzzles. But the creature is alive and acts naturally, as if it were a real animal. Persuading it to do what you need will take patience and guile, not force. To get it to move to a certain spot, for example, you may have to toss a barrel to that spot, and the curious creature will chase the barrel. Perhaps then you can use the creature's back as a stepping stone across a small chasm. You can use similar techniques to have the creature carry you through deep water or break open a wall for you.

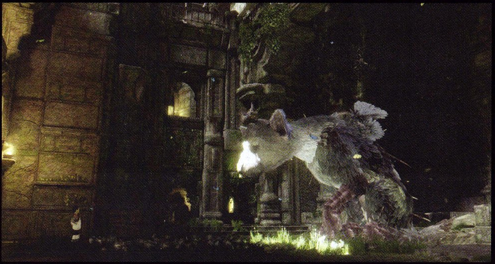
▼ It will center on the evolving relationship between a boy and a large mythical creature that's called "Trico" in the Japanese version. At first, the creature will be hostile toward the boy, but as the boy cares for the creature—feeding it, cleaning it, and playing with it, perhaps…their bond will deepen.



▲ You'll encounter enemies. We suspect the goal here will be to sneak past them instead of battling them. But perhaps the creature, with its sharp talons, can protect you. Then again, the creature might be afraid of the stone soldiers, too. It's hard to know what an animal's thinking.

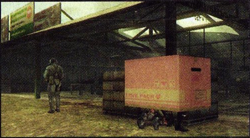


▲ The game has amazingly detailed graphics! None of these screens are CG cutscenes. *The Last Guardian* will utilize a physics engine—a first for Team ICO—so expect impressive crumbling environments. Oh, and see those feathers? They'll *individually* ruffle in the wind.

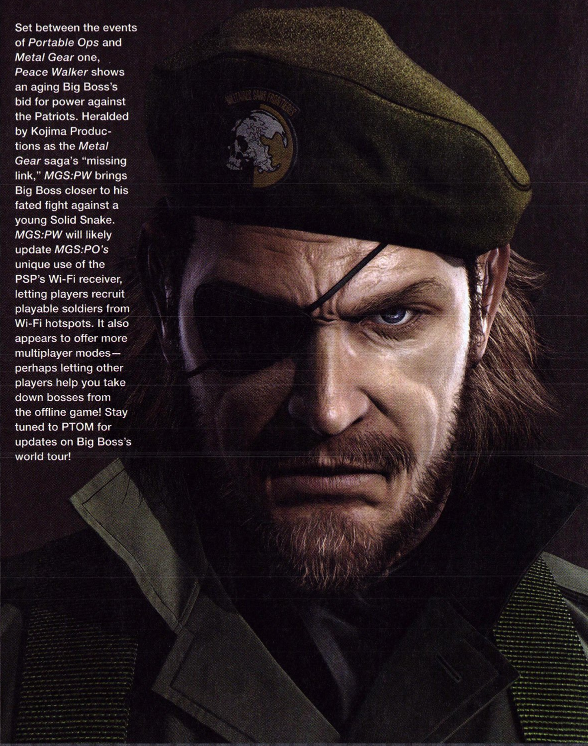


8 A SOLID FUTURE

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker



Set between the events of *Portable Ops* and *Metal Gear* one, *Peace Walker* shows an aging Big Boss's bid for power against the Patriots. Heralded by Kojima Productions as the *Metal Gear* saga's "missing link," *MGS:PW* brings Big Boss closer to his fated fight against a young Solid Snake. *MGS:PW* will likely update *MGS:PO's* unique use of the PSP's Wi-Fi receiver, letting players recruit playable soldiers from Wi-Fi hotspots. It also appears to offer more multiplayer modes—perhaps letting other players help you take down bosses from the offline game! Stay tuned to PTOM for updates on Big Boss's world tour!



FIVE Reasons NOT to be bummed about Raiden's *Rising*

Raiden earned a few Internets' worth of fan-hatred when he stole Solid Snake's stage in *Metal Gear Solid 2.* In *MGS4,* series director Hideo Kojima gave Raiden the *Six Million Dollar Man* treatment: "We can rebuild him—we have the technology!" Is it time for redemption?

1 *MGS4* redeemed Raiden from his role as sidekick and gave him all the badass cred he needs to man the *Metal Gear* helm.

2 Worried that Super Raiden means the end of trademark *MGS* sneaking? Don't be. *Rising* seems to take place some time after Raiden's bionic makeover but before *MGS4.* Super Raiden Beta will be awesome—but likely not perfect.

3 *MGS4* ended Solid Snake's story while hinting at things left unsaid about Raiden's. *Rising* may shed light on *Metal Gear* history left open between *MGS2* and *MGS4,* including Raiden's work for Big Mama against the Patriots.

4 Kojima fans can look forward to more tie-ins between the *Metal Gear* saga and *Snatcher.* In *MGS4,* Raiden mentioned "Dr. Pettrovich Madnar," the man who invented *Snatcher's* menacing androids. Perhaps the good doctor and others from Kojima's lesser-known games will play key roles in *Rising.*

5 With Big Boss's eye patch and his hobby of stealing warships, the *MGS* series has made a lot of hay for pirate-lovers. Raiden's side-story throws ninja fans a bone.

MGS on PSN

Relive Solid Snake's PS Debut

PlayStation
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR
SOLID
MATURE
M
KONAMI

Solid Snake may thrive on stealth, but there was nothing stealthy about his PlayStation debut over 10 years ago. *Metal Gear Solid* was a landmark hit for the console, and it's finally downloadable for PS3 owners through the PlayStation Network. There are plenty of reasons to grab it—to buff up on PlayStation history, to see Solid Snake's first leap into 3D, and (of course) to play a great game. Whether you're digging into *MGS* one for the first time or sneaking down memory lane, here are some old school strategies to keep your skills as sharp as young Snake's. (Slight spoilers follow, so read at your own risk!)

→ *MGS* one plays like a 2D game most of the time, but don't overrely on the radar. Press Snake against walls near corners to get a broader view of the area.

→ Press the Square button with the tip of your thumb to ready your gun, and then hold down the X button with your thumb's base to run while shooting.

→ Throw Chaff Grenades to briefly paralyze the Cyborg Ninja in Otacon's lab. Don't do this too often, or the ninja will begin fighting with his sword.

→ When you meet Meryl after your first time through the wolves' cave, punch her and equip the cardboard box. While she'd normally deck Snake (and deservedly so), she'll call a cub over to pee on the box. The wolves won't attack if you equip that same box during later trips.

→ During Snake's second fight against Sniper Wolf, hide behind the snow bank to the far right of the level. Equip the Nikita to defeat her with remote controlled missiles.

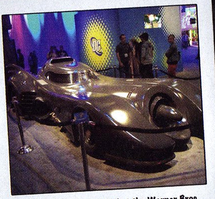
→ During the fistfight with Liquid, tap the X button during his melee combos to duck his attacks.

→ Once you've cleared *MGS* one, play Act 4 of *MGS4.* Reel at how far the PlayStation's graphics have come.

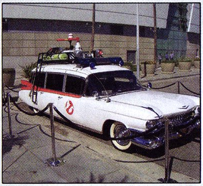
9 E3 Scrapbook

All the other stuff that delighted the PTOM staff and distracted us from our appointments during that crazy week in early June.

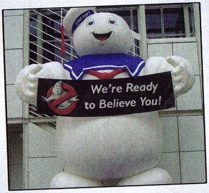
Hey, do you remember *waaay* back a couple of months ago when E3 happened? Well we do. And now that we've got all of our real coverage out of the way, we thought we'd share with you some of our favorite items that had nothing (or almost nothing) to do with the games that we saw. Enjoy!



The Batmobile was parked at the Warner Bros. booth for show-goers checking out *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Unfortunately, no test drives.

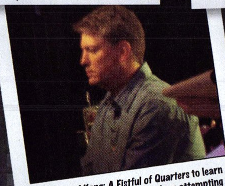


A geek-oriented convention wouldn't be complete without the Ghostbusters' Ecto-1. Not pictured: the films' theme song blaring over and over again.

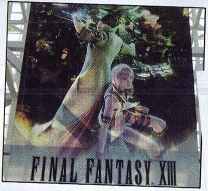


The Ecto-1 wasn't the only awesome *Ghostbusters* promotion on hand. Check out this giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. Terrifying or delicious?

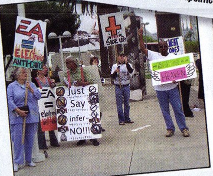
Fortunately, Bayonetta didn't trip on her high (and loaded) heels and accidently off a few ogling fans. We merely stopped by to discuss...politics.



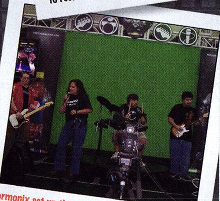
Watch *King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* to learn about Steve Wiebe. He spent the show attempting to reclaim his *Donkey Kong* world record. Dork!



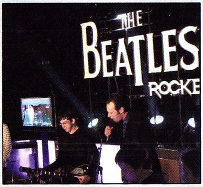
We know, "What's so exciting about gigantic banners?" But they're more than just banners; they're prestigious symbols! And they're *really* big.



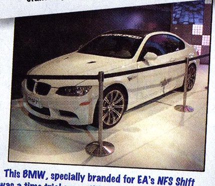
Protesters incensed by *Dante's Inferno*'s blasphemy? No, merely a staged marketing stunt to generate "controversy." Weak.



Harmonix set up this neat little stage in the South Hall foyer so that anyone with a spare moment could play *Rock Band*. What? Not cool enough?



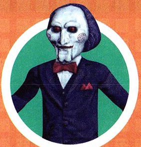
...how about *The Beatles: Rock Band* on the roof of a fancy LA hotel then? Complete with a random guest appearance by McLovin from *Superbad*.



This BMW, specially branded for EA's *NFS Shift* was a time trial competition prize. Sadly, we were too busy to enter. We totally would have won.

THE BURNING QUESTION 10

This month, we asked: What was the biggest disaster you've ever experienced as a developer?



Simon Lai

KONAMI, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

"I had a studio close while I was making a game… Climax Group's Santa Monica studio. I was working on some projects there when they had to shut it down."

Our take: You win, Simon. Losing your job is about as big as disasters get.

Mike Laidlaw

BIOWARE, LEAD DESIGNER

"I was working on *Jade Empire.* In the course of building the story, we had this kind of basic premise of the way the world worked… We're doing it for months. At this point, a new guy comes on the team. He's kind of the elder statesman of the writing department. He comes in and he's like, 'So, has anyone ever wondered why the dragons do *that?'* And it all came down like a house of cards. It was one month of scrambling. We suddenly had to rework about a third of the fundamental rules and laws of the entire cosmology governing *Jade Empire."*

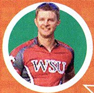
Our take: Wait, what was *"that"*? We missed something…

Matt Wilson

SOE SEATTLE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR

"On previous [MMO] games I've been on, we've had some disasters where the servers have gone down and we haven't been able to talk to the community, or we don't know what's going wrong and we've got to get it working in 24 hours and we're calling people in to get it working. But as much as those are disasters, those are kind of also some of the more exciting parts about your job because you're trying to solve that problem as fast as possible."

Our take: The Internet is a fickle mistress indeed, Matt.



Michael Gutmann

ZIPPER INTERACTIVE, VICE PRESIDENT

"Probably one of the most interesting is, one of our early titles ended up getting shipped on disc with audio only. So there was no game. In the boxes, they just got a disc of audio. It was one of our early PC games: *Top Gun.* Fortunately, it wasn't our problem, but it was the biggest disaster I have seen."

Our take: Well at least people got to listen to the classic *Top Gun* theme!

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from our work—or the stuff we have to pretend we're interested in so people think we have real lives.

Jack in the Box | Food | Varies

Marketing genius like the Jack in the Box commercials deserves support. Not that the healthy-eating contingent at PTOM Towers are on-board with too much fast food, but Jack deserves success because the entire marketing campaign over the past several months is so damn entertaining. That chipmunk-sounding ditty for the mini-sirloin burgers is just brilliant and backed up by the buffalo chicken wing dance. Like we need an excuse to go for burgers, but this put Jack on the map for us. And Rob's a sucker for catchy Chipmunk-style ditty-dom.

Cold Stone Creamery Ice Cream Cake | Dessert | $29.95 (Large Round)

In theory, Roger is against the whole idea of Ice Cream Cakes because he doesn't quite understand why putting the ice cream inside the cake should make it cost twice as much as it should be. In practice, and when someone else is picking up the tab, it's "Damn the convictions and full speed ahead!" to his tummy. And Cold Stone's cakes are the best of breed because they contain Roger's favorite ice cream flavor: the disturbingly unmanly sounding Sweet Cream.

Squash | Sport | Free

Fast food to healthy activities. This is how we stay in the good graces of our significant others who advise against the former and encourage to the point of nagging about the latter. We get plenty of exercise in the boxing ring, on the diamond, around Pebble Beach, and more…but virtually, care of *Fight Night Round 4, MLB 09: The Show,* and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10.* In 2003, *Forbes* magazine (the money-focused mag for people who are or want to be very rich) named squash the healthiest sport you could play. Odd source, but Rob will take it as his exercise of choice. Doesn't really show, frankly.

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete (Japanese version) | Blu-ray | ¥5,900

On her last trip to Japan, Teresa snapped up a copy of *Advent Children Complete* (the one with the *FFXIII* demo inside). The English dubs were surprisingly pleasant, and the new content gave the film a whole new spin. It actually makes sense now! It's awesome. Get it. (The demo's great, too, and works on U.S.-spec PS3s.)

The Menzingers | Band | $12.75 (for their debut album)

"That sounds exactly like this one Menzingers song." "What?" "That thing you wrote… it sounds like a song by The Menzingers." "Show me." And sure enough, Scott's friend was right. But in the process of crushing Scott's hopes and dreams, Scott's buddy inadvertently introduced him to this substantially awesome pop punk band from good old Scranton, Pennsylvania. Pick up "A Lesson in the Abuse of Information Technology" to check them out for yourselves!

Meomi.com | Website | Free

While researching Urban Vinyl culture for the cover story this month, Teresa stumbled upon this virtual design studio. The design aesthetic is "oddball cutesy," with big-eyed critters, mini-pixel monsters, and quirky animations. That penguin is now Teresa's buddy (icon)!

Kiva.org | Micro-lending Website | Depends on how much you loan

Poverty begets poverty. It's an unfortunate truth and a harsh reality that people stuck in impoverished communities must face on a daily basis. But Scott says we can help…and it won't cost a dime. Kiva.org is a non-profit micro-finance website that allows you to directly loan an amount of your choosing to an entrepreneur in an economically challenged part of the world. Your money will allow them to start and grow a business that will benefit not just the individual, but their entire community. And of course, your loan will eventually be repaid in full—which is more than you can say if you lend Roger a quarter!

Deep Space Bass: Toonami | CD | $39.99 on eBay

Long out of print, "Deep Space Bass" was released in 2001, as the official soundtrack to Cartoon Network's action TV block *Toonami.* Carlos the Intern covets the CD because it brings back good memories of watching cartoons and he can apparently afford paying exorbitant prices for rare CDs even though we only pay him in coffee. Carlos says check out http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClHhr0S0dAU for a sample of the kickass music.

Muno | Monster | Free with *Yo Gabba Gabba!*

Thanks to Roger's toddler daughter's disturbing addiction to the TV show *Yo Gabba Gabba!,* Roger too has become obsessed. His favorite monster? The very orange Muno who can seriously shred on guitar. His favorite *Gabba* song? The life-affirming "Think happy thoughts, happy thoughts… That's what you gotta do!" while his daughter favors the more resolute, "Keep trying, keep trying… Don't give up, never give up!" We're totally serious.

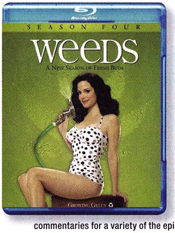
Coffee | Beverage | Free

There was a time ages ago when interns actually got paid for working on our mags. But then, we discovered that if we pumped them full of caffeine, they no longer cared whether they got paid or not. We've been pumping Carlos the Intern full of "free" coffee ever since he started working here. We especially like getting him all juiced up and releasing him to the freeway for his ride home. Ahhh, good times.

Blu-ray Central

Eclectic is the word of the month boys and girls. *Eclectic.* Good word

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH



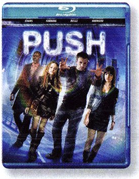
Weeds: Season 4

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** NR

| MOVIE | One of the best shows on TV just keeps getting better. *Weeds* takes a darker turn and hits a different location in Season 4, but is still spot on as one of the most daring and consistently great comedy/dramas on any network. Lionsgate does their usual exceptional job of transferring the show to Blu-ray with great picture quality and an exceedingly good 7.1 soundtrack. If you're of legal viewing age and not watching every episode of this gem, shame on you. After all, it's one of the only shows that's completely Blu.

| EXTRAS | Plenty of usually interesting commentaries for a variety of the episodes, along with a wide array of featurettes that are a mixed bag of quality.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



Push

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | *Push* is no *Jumper,* and we mean that in a good way. Ignored at theaters, the movie deserves to find an audience at home with this gorgeous pressing. It's the story of a ragtag group of psychically endowed sexy people on the run from a shadowy government organization that seeks to use them as weapons. Taking place entirely in Hong Kong, the labyrinthine plot teeters on the brink of crushing itself a bit too often, and if anything, the movie is overstylized in spots, yet its creative use of superpowers and excellent cast keep the story moving fast enough that it's hard to care.

| EXTRAS | Deleted scenes and decent cast and crew commentary for fans, and a surprisingly interesting featurette on the legitimacy of psychic powers.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

ISLA FISHER
CONFESSIONS OF A SHOPAHOLIC

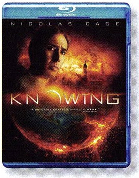
Confessions of a Shopaholic

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Ah, date night... It's been slow lately in the romantic comedy department, which gives this one a slight leg up. Also, it's nice to see a romantic comedy revolving around someone with rather severe mental illnesses—in this case, obsessive compulsive disorders and depression—even if the lead character is incredibly hard to take. Thankfully, the lovely Isla Fisher (the shopaholic) is surrounded by great characters providing enough laughs to get through. The movie is surprisingly focused on slapstick humor as well, which doesn't hurt.

| EXTRAS | Bloopers, deleted scenes, music videos, and featurettes about fashion. Guys, your wife and/or girlfriend might enjoy it, but you won't.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★½



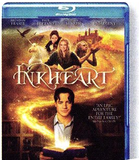
Knowing

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | It's far too easy to dismiss *Knowing.* After all, it is the second Nick Cage movie about predicting the future. Surprisingly, *Knowing* is nothing whatsoever like *Next.* Directed by *Dark City*-auteur, Alex Proyas, this is an amazingly complex and intelligent sci-fi thriller that will leave you with plenty to think about and discuss. The movie deftly and dangerously plays with the overlap of religion and science through what's essentially an apocalypse story, but Proyas' style is clear throughout. If you want something that's very different from any recent thriller, this is it.

| EXTRAS | Though the two featurettes are pretty standard stuff, the commentary with Proyas is insightful and worth checking out after you've seen the movie. He talks so much that he can't quite get to all the topics that would benefit from elaboration, but provides plenty of insight into his views on the story.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



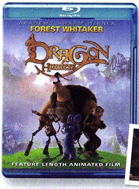
Inkheart

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | The latest attempt at bringing a tweener fantasy novel to the cinema is a surprising rally cry about the unsung dangers of reading. Er...wait, no, it's about Brendan Fraser's career being further relegated to the kiddie pool. This story of a guy named Mo who can bring story characters to life by reading aloud and the problems that ensue is harmless and charming enough, though adults will find Mo a mostly bone-headed wonder. The kids won't care as his daughter is, of course, smart, pretty, and clearly raising her single dad. Hurrah for clichés.

| EXTRAS | Plenty of entertaining content for the target audience of tweeners and teens, including a bizarre and spontaneous story creation bit from the cast and crew. Overall, it's interesting enough to keep the kids browsing for a while.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


ACADEMY AWARD WINNER FOREST WHITAKER
Dragon Hunters
FEATURE LENGTH ANIMATED FILM

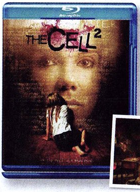
Dragon Hunters

PRICE: $22.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Apparently, in France, they like to disturb their children. *Igor* was already likely to screw up your young'uns, but this cross-Europe production is even harder to understand. It looks just like a videogame. The fantasy landscape is made up of floating orbs and islands, collapsing platforms, bizarre character designs, and bug-eyed monsters. Sadly, it plays out like a videogame, too. The tale of a young girl who hires two con-artist dragon hunters to rescue her uncle's kingdom isn't exactly original, but it is surprisingly harsh, violent, and really dark in spots. Like a standard CG flick on LSD, it will leave adults vaguely amused and confused, and their kids with nightmares.

| EXTRAS | Aside from a strange interview with the equally strange Forest Whitaker, who provides the voice of the hero, there are only a couple slide shows of the characters, monsters, and locations.

MOVIE ★★½
EXTRAS ★½



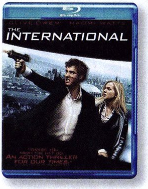
The Cell 2

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Look, no matter what you've heard, *The Cell* is a completely underrated horror masterpiece. It was a movie of stunning, disturbing visual style that makes standard serial killer movies look positively boring. The sequel, which has no relation to the original beyond the name, is a complete piece of crap. Written, acted, and directed like a third-string TV cop show, it's the story of a psychic looking for a killer named the "Cusp" who kills his victims in creative ways only to resuscitate them so he can do it again. If the plot and characters weren't so inane that might have been passable. The psychic visions look like a disco train wreck and this straight-to-video sequel needs to crawl back under a rock.

| EXTRAS | A single featurette—and not a particularly good one.

MOVIE ★
EXTRAS ★



The International

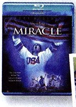
PRICE: $39.95 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | *The International* is a solid thriller on contemporary issues—a bank trying to take over arms dealing in warring third-world nations—with a great cast, and some truly amazing action sequences. Unfortunately, much of the movie is slow and talky. Clive Owen always makes a watchable hero, but the movie spends too much time trying to make its righteous point. If you don't mind the uneven pacing, there's plenty of great action here, making it a solid rental.

| EXTRAS | The sporadic commentary is dry, if insightful, but the PiP feature covers the whole movie with cast and crew commentary and behind the scenes info. There are several making-of featurettes that provide more background for the great locations of the film, and a collection of deleted scenes.

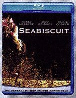
MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½

SPORTS MOVIES! Highlights from some of the most inspiring sports movies released in the past couple of months.



Miracle

For hockey fans! Decent video and powerful sound help this Blu-ray release about a great moment in sports history that you might not be old enough to remember. A truly amazing story, wonderfully told.



Seabiscuit

For, er, Jockeys... *Seabiscuit* looks and sounds great on Blu-ray, and is one of the most entertaining stories (based on the brilliant book, based on the inspiring true events) about a boy and his horse you'll find.

THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED

The Greatest Game Ever Played

For Golfers! A beautiful period piece on Blu-ray, but damned if it's nearly impossible to make golf look exciting no matter how many weird camera angles and cuts of inspiring music they use.

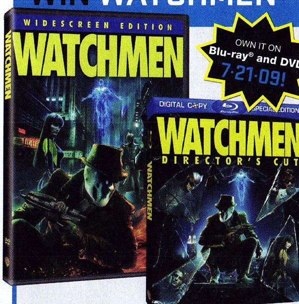
Cinderella Man

Cinderella Man

For Pugilists! We would have picked *Raging Bull* (which is also amazing in HD) as the title contender, but the topic is inspiring stories... This is a great boxing movie, with a beautiful transfer to Blu.

Jason D'Aprile hates to watch and play sports, yet loves sports movies. Go figure. Questions? Problems? Advice? E-mail him at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

WIN WATCHMEN



It's 1985 and superheroes have banded together to respond to the murder of one of their own. They soon uncover a sinister plot that puts all of humanity in grave danger. The heroes must fight to stop the impending doom only to find themselves a target for annihilation.

Yes, PTOM is giving you a chance to win one of 10... that's right, *10* copies of the brand-new *Watchmen* movie, coming to Blu-ray on July 21st. The Blu-ray disc even includes a digital copy so you can download a version for your on-the-go viewing pleasure.

All you need to do is send an email to PTOM_WATCHMEN@futureus.com with the words Who Watches the Watchmen? in the subject line. One entry per email address only please (rules below, we'll throw out you multiple-entry spammers. And note that the movie is rated R, which means you have to be over 18 to enter! Yeah, them's the rules.)

There, that was easy. We'll print the winners in our December 2009 issue.

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http://watchmenmovie.warnerbros.com/

Rules

No purchase is necessary to win. One entry per person. Entries must be received no later than 5:30PM PST on August 25, 2009. The winners will be chosen on or about August 26, 2009, and will be notified by email (or regular mail). The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. The sponsor of the contest is Future US, Inc. ("Future US"), 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Ten prizes will be awarded. Each prize consists of one copy of Watchmen Blu-ray with a retail value of $35.99 each. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries. This contest is open to legal residents of the United States only, excluding Rhode Island and Puerto Rico. Entrants must be at least 18 years of age. For a complete list of rules go to www.playstationthemagazine.com/officialrules

KILLZONE® 2

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

KILLZONE.COM

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PS3 | **P**

Dragon Age: Origins

Remember to pack a moral compass

PS3 AVAILABLE: October **GENRE:** RPG **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** BioWare

BIOWARE = RPG GODS

What makes us think this Canadian-based company will do the RPG genre justice? PC gamers can tell you: BioWare has one of the handsomest RPG legacies around. From the *Baldur's Gate* series to *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, from *Neverwinter Nights* to *Mass Effect*, BioWare knows how to spin a yarn that sucks players in. *Dragon Age: Origins* is BioWare's first foray onto the PS3, and we expect nothing less than perfection. No pressure or anything, guys. Just remember: you've only got one chance to make a first impression.

Our demands really aren't that lofty. We just want to go on an epic adventure—one where our story choices matter, where we'll build tangible relationships with thoroughly fleshed out characters, where magic-steeped combat will challenge our critical thinking, where events are tailored around the characters we've developed, and where choice is king and delivers truly emotional consequences. We want a game to make us seethe, and swoon, and cry. See? Not lofty at all. Yet why haven't we encountered a single RPG on the PS3 that meets those requirements?

Finally, we have a target in our sights with the potential to deliver all the above. *Dragon Age: Origins* promises to realize those demands, starting with a rich roster of characters and a personalized storyline. This, folks, could be the RPG we've been waiting for.

An Evolving Story

The story is set in a world threatened by Blights, dark periods where darkspawn (read: diseased monsters) rally under an Archdemon to invade civilization. You begin the main campaign by joining the Grey Wardens, an ancient organization that battles the darkspawn. But there's a problem: it's been centuries since the last Blight and the general populous has forgotten the danger. They consider the Grey Wardens outdated, and thus, the organization's members are few.

Then there's the even bigger problem: a new Blight has begun but no one believes it. It's up to you to search the land for allies and build an army strong enough to fend off the potential slaughter.

That's the overarching story. But your path to its conclusion will be anything but linear. It'll be rife with moral choices that affect future events. For example, when you decide to enlist some wandering

Expect magnificent spell effects. Create unexpected sparklies when you combine different spells, like an oil fire when your mage casts Grease and then Fire. Enemies caught in it (and friendlies, depending on your difficulty setting) will fry...

This is a parallel universe in *Dragon Age: Origins* called "the Fade." It's a dream world, of sorts, and mages venture within to obtain their powers. But beware of demons...

elves to join your army, they strike a deal: they'll join if you get rid of the werewolves that have been attacking them. You *could* kill the werewolves...or you could hear their side of the story. Turns out, these supernatural beings were once human, and this racial conflict goes back centuries. You see, the werewolves' human ancestors once kidnapped, raped, and then killed one of the elves' ancestors, and the elves cursed the humans and turned them into werewolves. And now, generations later, these once-human werewolves want your help.

What to do? Who's right and who's wrong? Which side do you favor? Which choice will help you build a better army to combat the Blight? And how does your personal background cloud your vision? (See the Story Behind the Story sidebar to learn about character origins.) We'll reveal this: it won't be easy to decide and your choices will have tangible, oftentimes graphic consequences...

Party Diplomacy

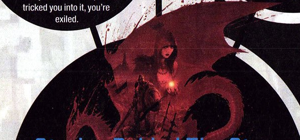
Your party make-up will be just as complicated. Throughout the game, you'll run into several NPCs that can join your band, including a ferocious war dog, a mysterious enchantress, and a racist, evangelical giant. Just like you, these guys have their own backgrounds and agendas, and they may not always get along. Each choice you make—such as whether to help the elves or werewolves—can affect what they think of you.

If they like your choices, it'll be reflected in an Approval meter. With high enough Approval, that party member will earn special battle boosts and you could even unlock special character side-quests (not to mention start romantic relationships, but be wary of love triangles). Conversely, if a party member dislikes your choices, they might leave your party forever (yikes!) or even start attacking you. ➔

That mirror in the background plays a significant role in the Dalish elf origin story. Does its mystery have anything to do with the bloody beast before it?

Yes! There are dragons in *Dragon Age: Origins!* This particular one is actually the mother of one of your party members... Guess they don't get along.

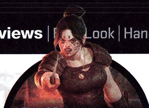
You know, when creatures like this are doing the seducing, maybe we don't mind being seduced...



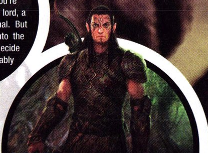
Stories Behind The Story

You've played games with multiple endings. Here's a game that also offers multiple beginnings. Pick one of six different identities—you'll still be able to customize your character's looks, gender, and job class to your liking—and hop into your character's "origin story."

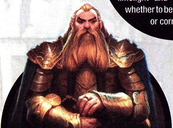
Through the intensely personal events that unfold during the first several hours and the difficult choices you face, you'll enter the main story campaign with an established emotional connection with your character. He (or she) will have regrets, blood enemies, and a secret, personal agenda to pursue, and these events will be the lens through which your character sees and interacts with the main campaign. It's like playing a character creation mini-RPG that will affect how the core story progresses.



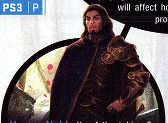
Dwarf Commoner You're the lapdog of a local crime lord, a nobody, a scumbag criminal. But suddenly, you're thrown into the limelight and have to decide whether to behave honorably or corruptly...



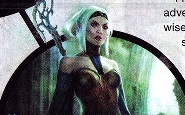
Dalish Elf The Dalish refuse to be subjugated like the city elves, so they wander, wildly chasing the culture and knowledge of their noble past. But one day, you find a dangerous relic from the very past you've been pursuing, and that relic is powerful. And, perhaps, evil.



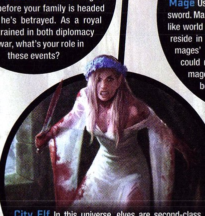
Dwarf Noble On the night you're to be commissioned as a commander of the dwarven army, you kill your brother. Though politicians wanting to tarnish your father's reputation tricked you into it, you're exiled.



Human Noble Your father is king. On the night before your family is headed for war, he's betrayed. As a royal figure trained in both diplomacy and war, what's your role in these events?



Mage Using magical powers is a double-edged sword. Mages channel their abilities from a dream-like world called "The Fade," but the demons that reside in that world try to seduce and corrupt mages' souls. If successful, those demons could rain disaster upon the world. Thus, mages are kept under strict watch. You begin the game by undergoing a test with a demon.



City Elf In this universe, elves are second-class citizens. On the day of your wedding, a human lord demands to have his way (he calls it "privilege") with the bride (which is you, if you play a female). You can imagine how that goes down.

PS3 | P

Combat Calls

In battle, you'll control one of four party members (the rest will be AI-controlled) and can switch between them on the fly. You'll be able to participate in the battle in one (or all) of three ways:

First, you can play it like an action-adventure game: run up, position yourself wisely, and tap on hot-keyed spells or skills, and attack. Just keep in mind that this is an input-based RPG, so you'll have to wait for each skill to execute before you can activate the next. It'll feel chunkier than an action game.

Second, for finer control, pause the game at any time, queue up commands (up to one command per party member), unpause, and watch the characters perform the attacks you queued, then pause again to line up another set. Great for setting up spell combos, like having one mage cast a Grease spell (which makes enemies slip and fall) and another cast a Fire spell, which sets the grease on fire. *Devastating.*

Third, you can set Tactics for the AI-controlled party members, by setting up parameters and commands. This works like the gambit-system in *FFXII.* So you could tell your mage to heal any party member who gets below 50-percent health, or command your rogue to automatically sneak up and backstab enemies standing solo.

Put together, here's what we think battle could look like: you start out controlling an archer and shoot a few arrows to attract some enemies to your group. One of the enemies slugs you with a club, so your mage automatically heals you (thanks to Tactics). You switch to your warrior to position him up front, to absorb the hits. Then, you pause and queue up Cone of Cold with one mage (which freezes enemies) and Stone Fist with the other (an elemental rock attack). When you unpause, the two attacks form into a spell combo, and frozen enemies shatter to pieces behind you while you run your warrior up to the next batch of enemies. Sounds incredible, but only if it works as well as it sounds.

Dragon Age: Origins will be about choice. You'll decide how you want to battle. Through the 80 or so hours you spend immersed in the story, you'll decide who your characters become. You'll be emotionally invested. And though your experience might be vastly different from ours, we might both be equally passionate about the stories we've created. And that's what excites us. Teresa Dun

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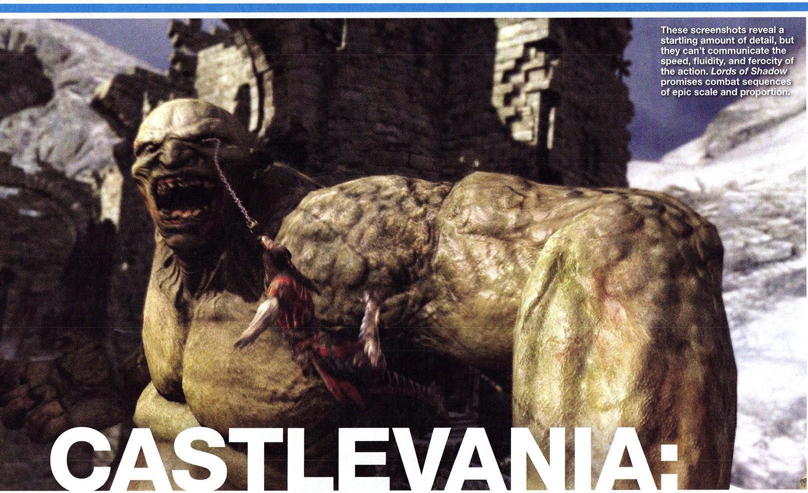


These screenshots reveal a startling amount of detail, but they can't communicate the speed, fluidity, and ferocity of the action. *Lords of Shadow* promises combat sequences of epic scale and proportion.

CASTLEVANIA: Lords of Shadow

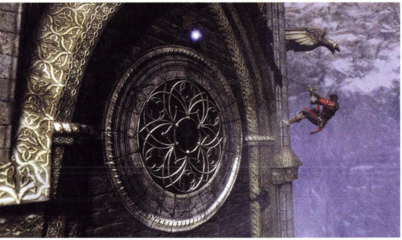
First Look

PS3 | P

Shades of *Metal Gear?*

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 GENRE: Action Adventure PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Mercury Steam

▼ Gabriel's Combat Cross is apparently quite versatile—sort of like a medieval Swiss Army knife.



With the news of *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Maker* and *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* quickly expunging the notion that the vaunted series had come to an end, you'd think that Hideo Kojima would be satisfied with his slate of resurrection duties. Apparently not, as Konami's E3 announcement of Kojima's involvement in the re-imaging of *Castlevania* instantly imbues the game with an air of intrigue.

You may remember Konami announced *Lords of Shadow* (sans *Castlevania* tag) a year ago with a short teaser and some concept art. It stirred up a bit of interest, but it's amazing how slapping the *Castlevania* name in front of a game can generate such a feverish level of excitement. Kojima likens his involvement on the project to that of a midwife supporting the Madrid-based developer Mercury Steam, but however small, the name attachment reinvigorates a franchise that has plodded along steadily, but not made a significant jump into the next-generation.

Pulp fiction

The story is like something out of a trashy fantasy novel. The three factions of the evil Lords of Shadow are threatening the Earth's existence, causing the souls of the dead to appear. The only salvation against the Lords' army of psychotic monsters is Gabriel, a member of the Brotherhood of Light—an elite group of holy knights, whose wife was murdered. Her soul has been trapped, which is bad news for her but kind of decent for Gabriel since she acts as his guide while in limbo. Still with me? Good. It's at least the sort of emotive story that fans of *Castlevania* and Kojima expect.

Gabriel's weapon

It's unclear how much the game has transformed since the *Lords of Shadow* premise was hitched to *Castlevania's* legacy, or the initial impact of Kojima's involvement, but one feature that still takes center

▲ It's difficult to imagine battles more brutal than the *God of War*-series, but you can bet Kojima will carefully consider the competition.

stage is Gabriel's Combat Cross weapon. This versatile gizmo can operate as an extendible chain for ranged attacks and to grab enemies, a nightstick-style melee weapon, and a close-range stabbing tool.

In truth, it looks and sounds very *God of War*-like, though not quite to the same slavish level of "inspiration" as *Dante's Inferno*. The puzzle elements put it in the same bracket as THQ's *Darksiders: Wrath of War*. There are really impressive boss battles against creatures such as trolls, spiders, frost giants, and werewolves, with some of these monsters filling the entire screen. The game looks less impressive and more like any other run-of-the-mill third-person hack-'em-up when Gabriel is up against regular smaller enemies, but it's still early.

I like the idea of roaming around an open game world, yet with a strong focus on story and set pieces (again, much like in *Darksiders*). Southern Europe during the Middle Ages is comprised of snowy mountains, wastelands teeming with the undead, forests, catacombs, and of course, the odd Gothic castle or two. When the game was simply *Lords of Shadow* it was stated that Gabriel's powers could be improved by collecting dark artifacts, which may become a bigger feature now that the game is geared towards *Castlevania* fans. The image of the mask used to tease the game on Kojima's website before E3 is also intriguing, since this item enables you to bring the dead back to life.

Stellar voice cast

Konami has pulled out all the stops with a stellar voice cast as well. Gabriel is voiced by Robert Carlyle *(Trainspotting, 28 Weeks Later)*, Natascha McElhone *(Californication)* plays Gabriel's wife, Patrick Stewart *(Star Trek: TNG)* is the mysterious Zobek (and narrator of the first trailer), and Jason Isaacs (Malfoy in *Harry Potter)* is in there too, presumably playing one of the Lords of Shadow.

Over the next year it's going to be exciting to see how Kojima stamps his mark on the game (the cutscenes already drip with *MGS*-grade gravitas) as well as how it's re-imagined. Some of the *Castlevania* games in 3D haven't really been up to scratch. This is one flagging franchise whose resurrection should be spectacular.

Jonathan Todd

A History of Vampire Hunting

The *Castlevania* series *(Akumajo Dracula* in Japan) spans 23 years, numerous gaming systems, and nearly 30 games. And almost every one of them involves (directly or indirectly) the Belmont family, a long line of whip-cracking vampire hunters tasked with fighting the undead armies of Count Dracula, who rises from the dead every 100 years (or whenever else the plot calls for it). The series has left some of its most notable marks on the PlayStation family of consoles, chronicled here for those who come to the franchise late:

PlayStation
Castlevania
Symphony of the Night

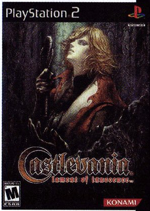
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night (PSone)

Widely considered a 2D masterpiece, *Symphony* completely changed the direction of the series from linear action to nonlinear exploration, and is the main reason why "Metroidvania" is now a word. Starring Dracula's son, Alucard, it featured tons of weapons, RPG-style progression, transformations, helpful monster sidekicks, and an entire secret second half of the game.

PlayStation
Castlevania
Chronicles

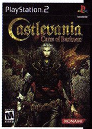
Castlevania Chronicles (PSone)

Chronicles was a huge step back for *Castlevania*, but then, it was meant to be. A visually enhanced (but otherwise untouched) remake of the series' first game, it focused on vampire hunter Simon Belmont and his quest to kill Dracula, Frankenstein, some mummies, hordes of skeletons, flying Medusa heads, and lesser monsters that inhabited Dracula's hazard-filled castle.



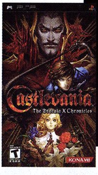
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence (PS2)

Lament wasn't the first 3D *Castlevania*, but it's arguably the best. Providing an origin story for the series, it stars Leon Belmont, a young Crusader out to rescue his lost love from a vampire (who isn't Dracula), and focuses heavily on exploration and whip-centric, *Devil May Cry*-style action.



Castlevania: Curse of Darkness (PS2)

The follow-up to *Lament*, *Curse* told the story of Hector, a former Dracula henchman who fought with swords and summoned monsters called "Innocent Devils." It was also widely greeted with apathy by fans, who roundly dissed its bland graphics and uninspired *Dynasty Warriors*-esque gameplay.



Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles (PSP)

On the surface a 3D remake (with 2D gameplay) of *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood*, prequel to *Symphony* and the one *Castlevania* game that had never previously come to the U.S., *DXC* finally gave fans the game they'd been pleading for for years. It also featured—as unlockable extras—the original 2D *Rondo*, as well as *Symphony* for good measure. Oh, and as a remake, it was pretty great.

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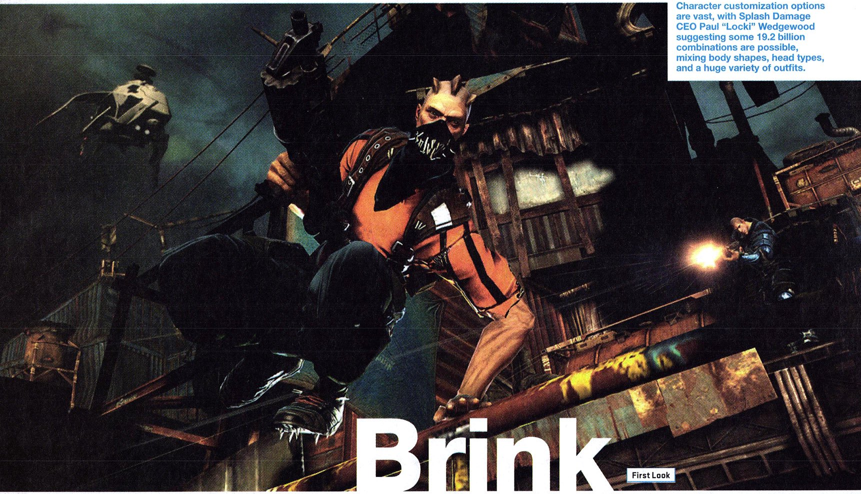


Character customization options are vast, with Splash Damage CEO Paul "Locki" Wedgewood suggesting some 19.2 billion combinations are possible, mixing body shapes, head types, and a huge variety of outfits.

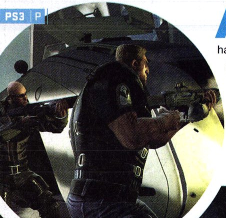
Brink

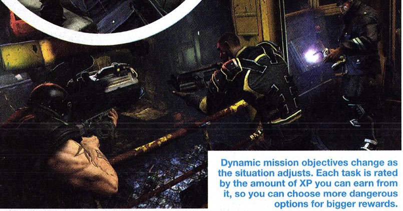
First Look

The world's last survivors...killing each other

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Bethesda DEVELOPER: Splash Damage

▼ Graffiti around the Ark tells the tale of the factions' conditions, with pleas like "Our children are starving," met with bullets and ambushes from the security forces.





Dynamic mission objectives change as the situation adjusts. Each task is rated by the amount of XP you can earn from it, so you can choose more dangerous options for bigger rewards.

Are we really that self-destructive? Aboard a floating city, the Ark, in 2035 after contact has been lost with the mainland and assuming that the residents are the last remaining humans on the planet, factions and rivals turn it into a bullet- and bomb-fuelled battleground. *Brink* is already showing as a visually stylized, fast-paced action game in which you can switch character classes on the fly depending on what's needed for the mission at hand and where the lines between single- and multiplayer are blurred to the point of being virtually irrelevant. To get more of the details, we quizzed Ed Stern, Senior Game Designer at Splash Damage.

Was the Ark peaceful before contact with people on land was lost? How long did it take for the factions to form?

By the time the player joins the game the main social friction is between those who were part of the original Ark project (the Founders, "Prof" technologists and engineers, and a small corporate security department) and the refugees (initially referred to, ironically, as "Guests") who arrived en masse in the mid-2020s. The escalating tension between these two factions spills over into an outright civil war.

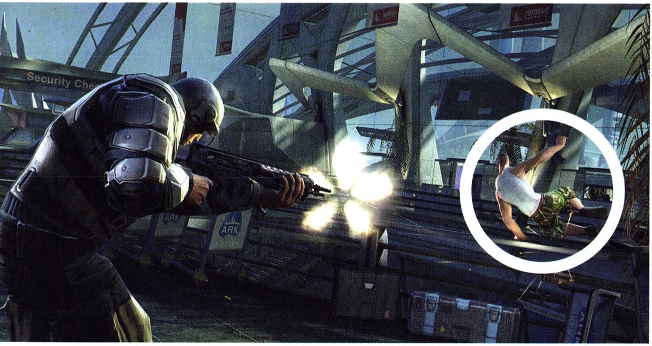
Since you can swap character classes at any time is experience earned for specific class actions?

You earn XP all the time, from actions performed as any player class or in either faction. If you earn enough XP you can level up. Every time you level up, you can "purchase" one new ability. This new ability can be for any class, or it can be one of our class-agnostic skills, which means you'll be able to use the ability no matter what class you are at any time. Some abilities are traditional stat improvements (more speed, hit points, power, etc.) and some abilities are completely new items and actions you can perform.

In the core Security vs. Resistance struggle are the security forces tagged more as the bad guys?

We're really keen to get away from a Manichean black-and-white schema. In real life, things are complex where no two people think exactly alike and everyone has their own opinions, beliefs, prejudices, suspicions and paranoia. Why should games be Hero vs. Ogre fairy tales?

In *Brink* both factions have good



Parkour-style movement in *Brink* should build on the fluidity of environment-hopping we saw in *Mirror's Edge*. Look up as you hit the SMART button and you'll jump at the target ledge in reach. Time looking down and you'll slide behind cover or under an obstacle.

The indispensable Ed Stern.

reason to believe their worldview is correct and to be suspicious of their opponents' motivations. Both factions are also vulnerable to being manipulated by those who can package the world in ways that appeal to their worldview. The Resistance believes they are fighting for justice and survival. The Security also believe they're fighting for the same thing. Nobody thinks of themselves as a terrorist or an unjustly oppressive thug, they always have their own reasons and justifications.

How was the SMART [Smooth Movement Across Random Terrain] system of dynamic movement conceived and tweaked to be intuitive in play?

We knew we wanted players to be much more mobile than in previous games. It just made no sense that you couldn't get over shoulder-high walls, or you could get over waist-high walls but not waist-height-plus-one-pixel-high walls. So we let the lighter body types get over them, and every other maneuver they'd be able to do in real life (plus 15-percent coolness factor). Aubrey Hesselgren, one of our Technical Designers, was a parkour runner in a previous life. He was delighted to strap a video camera to his head and plunge and bound about to examine how first-person agility can and can't be visually communicated.

By the way, you can always time the jumps and ducks yourself. In fact, you'll move even more quickly and smartly if you do take the time and trouble to master your own jumps and ducks. But SMART lets players get into the game fast and without frustration so they can concentrate on making smart tactical choices rather than sweating about button presses.

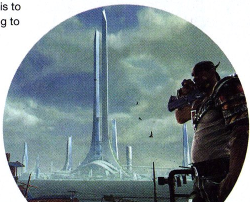
Mid-mission class changes generate new roles for other players based on your change, how does that work in co-op, with other live players if people are changing all around you.

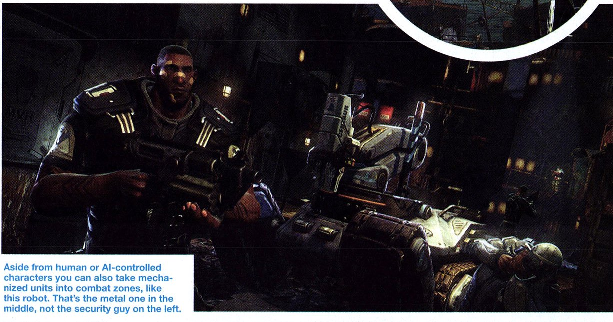
It's exactly the same whether the players are you, other humans, or AI-controlled. If you're knocked on your arse, incapacitated by a grenade, friendly Medics (both human and AI) will get a mission to revive you, and enemy Operatives will get a mission to interrogate you. If you get revived, the other revive and the interrogate missions disappear. If you get interrogated, the other interrogate and revive missions disappear. The number of human players is immaterial.

If a player changes class, obviously their missions will change too. For example, if you're a Medic and your team's primary objective is to demolish a barrier, you're going to get the most XP from protecting the soldier who's trying to plant a demo charge on the barrier. If there is no one on your team who's a soldier, we'll bribe you with extra XP to change class to be that soldier. Hell, we'll even bribe you with XP to be the second player to switch to a soldier.

Rob Smith

▼ Let's guess: Global warming? Contact with land ended after Iran got the bomb, oil dried up, and the polar icecaps melted and flooded New York?





Aside from human or AI-controlled characters you can also take mechanized units into combat zones, like this robot. That's the metal one in the middle, not the security guy on the left.

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: A Crack in Time

First Look

Lombaxes, time travel, and bucketfuls of golden bolts

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Platformer PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games

It's like playing a Pixar film." That's what fans of 2007's *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* claimed. And with its smooth platforming gameplay, wildly creative weapon arsenal, and sparkling graphics, the game was indeed impressive, but it didn't quite feel up to the standards of a Pixar film, especially story-wise.

But this time around, Insomniac's Creative Director Brian Allgeier promises a whole new level of finesse. "It picks up where *Tools of Destruction* and *Quest for Booty* left off. We're going to find out why Clank was abducted [by the mysterious Zoni], why Doctor Nefarious is behind it all, and answer some of the big questions that have come up in the franchise. This game wraps up the story arc that was started in *Tools of Destruction.*"

PS3 | P

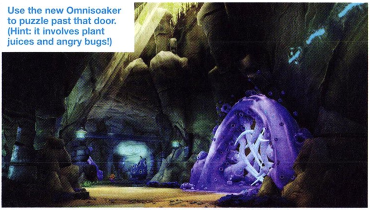
But that's not all. Allgeier also promises a stronger emotional connection. "We want to add more touching moments into the game. With *Tools of Destruction,* we felt like we were able to make a game that *looked* like a CG animated movie. With this game, we want it to *feel* like one." And they plan to do so with the clever puzzles, lovingly designed enemies, and arsenal of gadgety goodness that's always been the hallmark of the series.

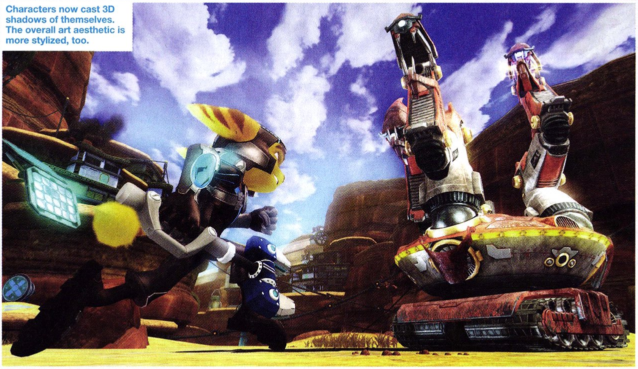
Teresa Dun

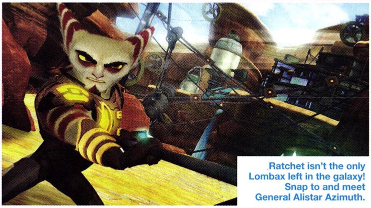
NEW ENEMIES!

Agorian Beastriders
These are the Agorians. And their beasts, which they ride. Hence the name.

Hydratanks
To fight these three-headed robotic tanks, you'll have to whittle away a third of their health, then use your wrench to tether onto one its fuses and tug. This causes a head to short out and explode. They don't like that.


Use the new Omnisoaker to puzzle past that door. (Hint: it involves plant juices and angry bugs!)


Characters now cast 3D shadows of themselves. The overall art aesthetic is more stylized, too.


Ratchet isn't the only Lombax left in the galaxy! Snap to and meet General Alistar Azimuth.

Wickedly fun gadgets

Plasma Striker
It's like a sniper rifle, but when you zoom in, Ratchet will be able to see enemies' weak points (pictured above). Hit those and you'll inflict extra damage!

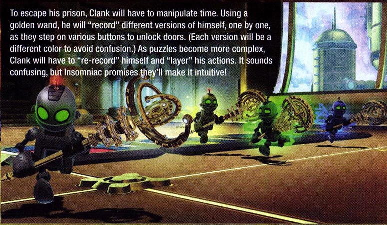
Sonic Erupter
A weird frog-like creature that emits a mating call so horrendous that it actually damages enemies. If you time your attacks with the Sonic Erupter to the natural rhythm of the creature's calls, you can let loose extra powerful belches.

Hover Boots
These boots let Ratchet zoom around levels much more effectively. You can use them to jump off ramps or kick-off certain walls. These babies can be used anywhere on any level. Yes!

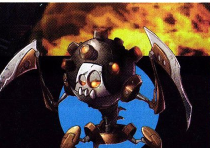
Cryo Mines
Toss these cool weapons to freeze enemies in place, which makes them perfect targets for the Plasma Striker. Cryo Mines also do a little bit of damage to the targets, too.

SCREWING AROUND WITH TIME

To escape his prison, Clank will have to manipulate time. Using a golden wand, he will "record" different versions of himself, one by one, as they step on various buttons to unlock doors. (Each version will be a different color to avoid confusion.) As puzzles become more complex, Clank will have to "re-record" himself and "layer" his actions. It sounds confusing, but Insomniac promises they'll make it intuitive!



Battlebots
These are bots built for battle. (Great name they've got.) Don't be misled by their quirky expressions. They're trying to kill you.



Homefront

First Look

Survival never goes out of style

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Summer 2010 **GENRE:** First-person Shooter **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** Kaos Studios

Rural Colorado, 2027. A small, self-sufficient settlement is quietly being abandoned. "Pack what you need. We're not coming back here," calls a voice filled with anxious authority. But no one gets a chance. Shots ring out in the distance providing only enough time for an icy wave of panic to grip the camp before an army engulfs the settlement, plunging it into deadly chaos. The fight for survival begins… just moments before the demo ends.

This atmosphere of desperation serves as the intriguing backdrop for *Homefront.* In the near future, a nuclear North Korea successfully invades the United States during a global energy crisis, leaving its citizens to resist the occupation and defend their own existence by any means available. The "oil war" premise may not be new, but having to defend U.S. soil from a foreign invader…well, that's a bit more unique.

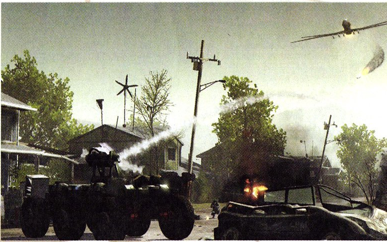
You play the role of resistance leader Connor Mason (who may or may not be related to *Red Faction's* Alec Mason), a man who is apparently presumed dead at the start of the game. In fact, the demo actually opens with Mason waking up bleary-eyed in a Colorado safe house. With little explanation of who Connor is or how he ended up unconscious in a Midwestern bed, a solemn soldier begins to lead him through the makeshift town. And that's when the trouble starts.

As explosions begin to level the city, Connor is handed an assault rifle…and things get interesting in a hurry. The action feels like a healthy blend of *Call of Duty 4* and *Killzone 2* (but without all the gray and brown): the weaponry, movement, and shooting mechanic are all roughly comparable; plus, you're totally immersed in chaos, with explosions and stray bullets ripping apart the environment and no HUD to distract you.

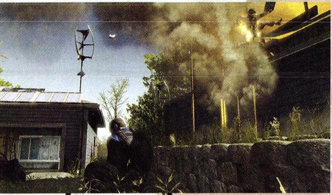
The cinematic action can be attributed (at least in part) to *Homefront's* "drama engine," which, according to the developers, dynamically generates dramatic moments without removing the player from the action. Imagine if a scripted event adjusted to fit whatever you happened to be doing—like, say, if an exploding truck careened directly past you regardless of where you were standing—and you've got the general idea.

Homefront's other major device is Goliath, a robotic, weaponized jeep that you can control with a laser designator. Just point, click, and wait for your "badass sidekick" to clear a path for you. Given that you'll always be outnumbered and outgunned, unmanned vehicles like Goliath will play an important role in your resistance efforts. For now, though, the invasion is a ways off. At ease, comrade.

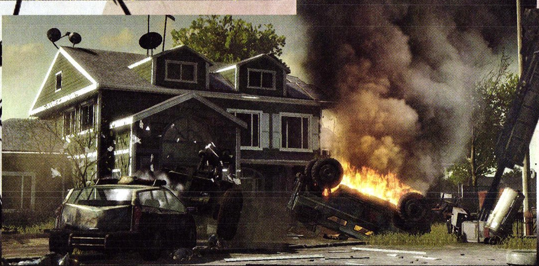
Scott Butterworth



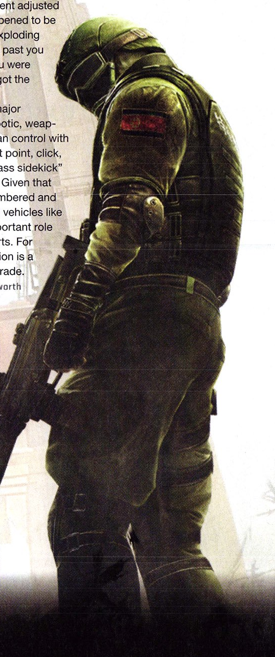
During the demo, the developers teased a "massive multiplayer component." This does look a bit like *MAG*...



◄ Ignore the peaceful rural setting and focus on the guy-on-fire flying out of a window.



▼ See the jeep with the giant tires that's monster-trucking that car? That's Goliath.



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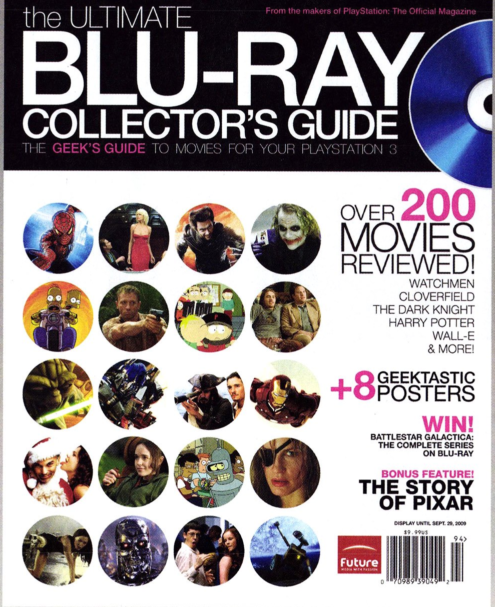

From the makers of PlayStation: The Official Magazine

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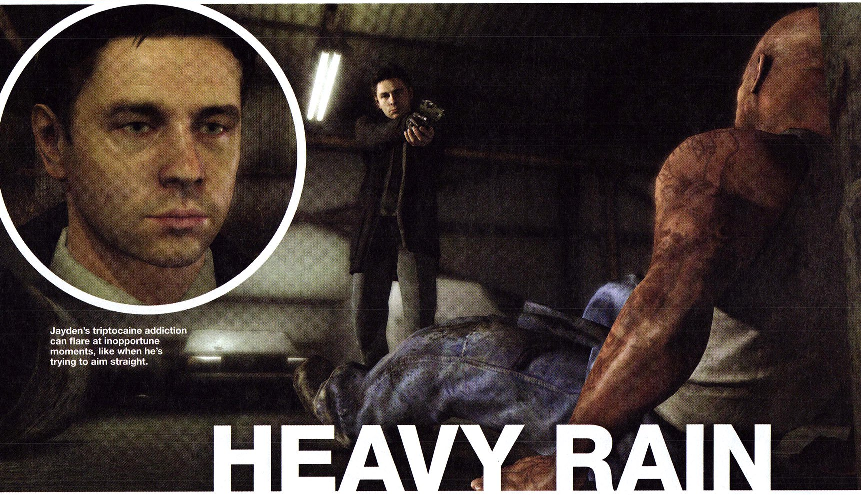


Jayden's triptocaine addiction can flare at inopportune moments, like when he's trying to aim straight.

HEAVY RAIN

You're gonna do WHAT?!

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2010 GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Quantic Dream

▼ The Blue Lagoon dance club is well populated, but for journalist Madison Paige she has one target on her mind. What she has to do to get there... that's the eye opener.

PS3 | P

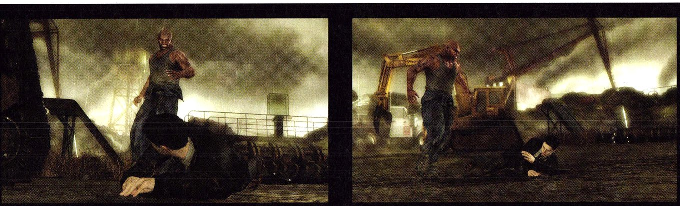
Journalist Madison Paige needs to get sexier. The club boss she needs to talk to isn't noticing her stilted shimmying on the dance floor. But he's clearly attracted to a bit of trashy in his ladies. With a killer on the loose, Paige needs answers, so she heads to the restroom to undo some blouse buttons, apply more eyeliner and lipstick, and tear a few inches from her skirt . More leg, more cleavage, more sexy...should do the trick.

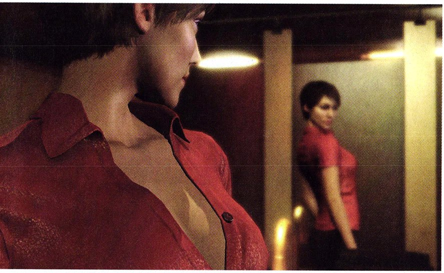
You'd be forgiven for thinking that even in a guaranteed M-rated cinematic adventure game that all those events would be presented as a cutscene. Wrong. You're controlling it. Carefully sweeping the analog stick to apply the eyeliner, picking the buttons to let loose, and yanking the Sixaxis controller to imitate a quick rip to the fabric of the skirt.

Back on the dance floor, Paige's target's eye for the thigh catches her racier look, and he invites her over. Now the scene becomes even more compelling. The club boss leads her to a back room where he instructs her to strip for him. For reals. And so she begins, with thoughts swirling around her head, each button press providing the "what would you do?" options that range from removing her blouse or skirt, to running away, to grabbing a nearby lamp to use as a weapon.

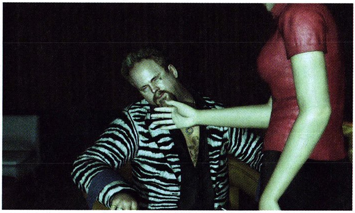
Showdown

FBI profiler Norman Jayden has to fight Mad Jack in a scrap yard, barreling through a series of quick-time events to decide how well, or how painful the showdown with the mound of muscle becomes.





You've got the look. But how more buttons do you pop in the bathroom?



That's a slap in the face. Seems you'll have the chance to make the first move against the perv who wants you to strip.

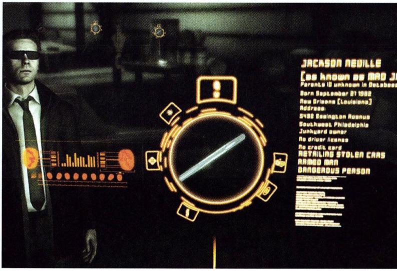
Slip into something more comfortable

Off comes the blouse. But he's more insistent. Next the skirt, and Madison Paige is standing in front of a gun-toting hood in her underwear. The thoughts—in game, that means the options available to you on how to react—are now swirling faster around her head, blurring and fading, rushing by as the adrenaline surges and she searches for the right move to make. To be clear, there is no "right" move, just options on your journey and your experience of this story. Though it wasn't actually shown in our demo, we know that you can go further, taking off the bra and—we've had confirmed from sources that saw a demo of the game in Europe—pants, too. That's full frontal nudity, folks (though SCEA is not confirming that those options will actually be available in the final U.S. product).

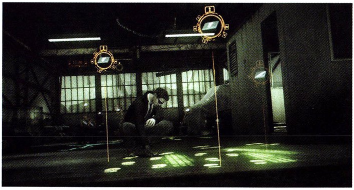
What's intriguing is how the game world and story will react based on your emotional response to the situation. Maybe you're so offended by his suggestion that you immediately lunge for the lamp. What happens? Maybe you go all the way? Will the guy get so giddy he provides everything you need (but would you respect yourself in the morning?) Or he shoots you dead and Madison Paige's role in the search for the Origami Killer ends in a sleazy club back room. It's fascinating to think that each decision moment will lead down a very personal story path. We don't know for sure what will happen in any of those eventualities, but it's clear you're making your own decisions for situations where you'll be telling your friends "did you see the bit when…?" and they have totally different responses.

Whatever the case, this teaser taster, including an initial scene with a second playable character, Norman Jayden, an FBI profiler with a drug problem (harrumph), showcased inventive game controls that really shouldn't be surprising but also aren't easily described. It seems for sure that the experience of *Heavy Rain* will truly be in the telling of your own individual tale…and whether you choose to keep clothes on or sneak a peek.

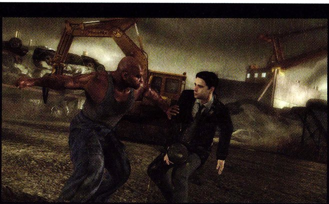
Rob Smith



Futuristic vision: The one conceit to not quite real world science is the device Jayden carries that taps into FBI records to instantly pull data on people and items you encounter.



▲ CSI? Grounded in real technology (you've seen the glowing blue light that highlights blood splatters on TV shows), Jayden's device allows him to find bloodied footprints, indicating Mad Jack is a "person of interest" in the Origami Killer case.

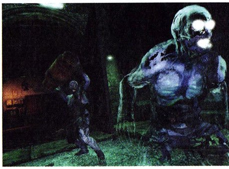


Singularity

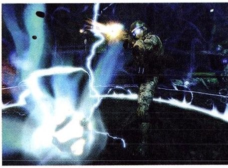
Hands-On

Time on your hands

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: First-person shooter PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Raven Software



Above: an enemy out of phase with time. Below: a soldier protected by a bubble of frozen time. We swear it makes sense!



It's a dead-end. Twenty seconds into the demo and I'm stuck under a staircase. No switches nearby; no exploding barrels in sight. So I take the only logical step: using the Time Management Device strapped to my wrist, I put a quick 60 years on the stairs and sure enough, they crumble under the weight of all that time. And once I've walked through the resulting rubble, I reverse the process, watch the steps rebuild themselves, and continue climbing towards my next destination.

Of course, the TMD is just one of the many mind-melting temporal concepts at play on Katorga-12, a small Russian island that, during the early days of the Cold War, suffered a catastrophic accident that obliterated any conventional notion of time. The island jumps you between 1950 and 2010 seemingly at random and certainly without your consent. It even occasionally drops you into the "Null Zone," an area where you exist outside of time despite the fact that your physical location hasn't changed (yeah, trippy).

But beyond simply messing with your head, *Singularity's* ambitious temporal antics affect everything from the story to the gameplay. At the top of those stairs, for instance, awaits an Echo Event: a moment from the past, frozen in time, forever replaying in a vaguely ethereal form similar to Jack's visions in *BioShock* (a game that clearly influenced the developers at Raven). Essentially, the events offer a glimpse into the past…but in real time.

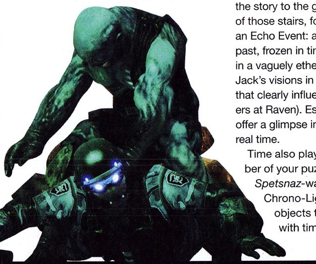
Time also plays a role in a number of your puzzle-solving and *Spetsnaz*-wasting abilities. The Chrono-Light allows you to see objects that are "out of phase with time," like a fuse for a mechanical door that's trapped in the Null; Chrono-Stasis allows you to grab those objects but also lets you instantly freeze an object (like an incoming rocket) in time and hold it or throw it as you please; and Dead Locks are essentially time grenades that create a bubble of frozen time which you can then blow out to slow down your surroundings for a few precious seconds.

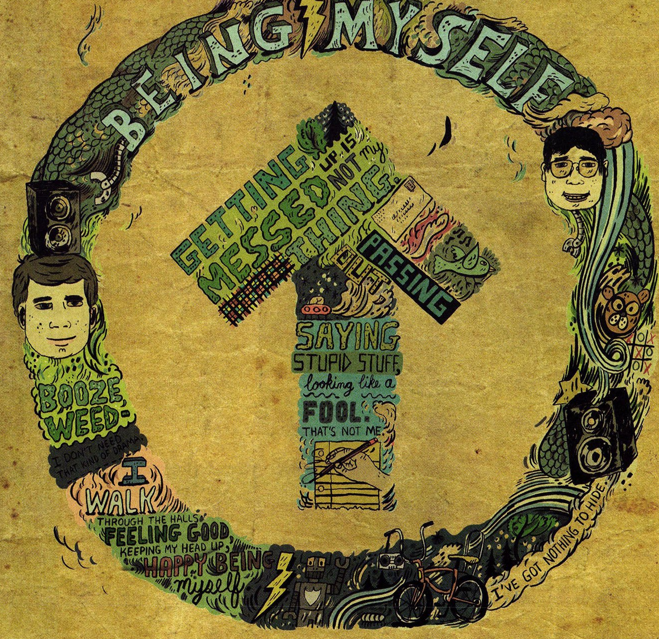
In our hands-on time, all the potentially confusing elements actually gelled quite well. The team's commitment to storytelling really shined through and the game world established its own uniquely creepy atmosphere. Plus, the gameplay already feels super solid. The shooting mechanics for the more conventional weapons like shotguns and pistols felt tight, but using time to take down enemies proved even more satisfying. Aging a bad guy into oblivion or using time to drop a building on him or guiding a bullet in slow motion…just awesome.

Scott Butterworth

PS3 | P

▼ This is a parasite spawned by the original Katorga-12 disaster. Cute, huh?




BEING MYSELF
GETTING MESSED UP IS NOT MY THING.
PASSING OUT
SAYING STUPID STUFF, looking like a FOOL. THAT'S NOT ME.
BOOZE, WEED- I DON'T NEED THAT KIND OF DRAMA.
I WALK THROUGH THE HALLS FEELING GOOD, KEEPING MY HEAD UP, HAPPY BEING myself
I'VE GOT NOTHING TO HIDE.

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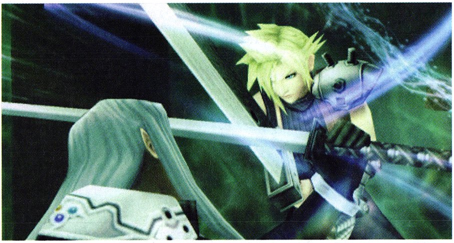
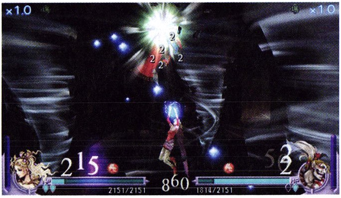
PlayStation Gallery

Updates, sneak peeks, and works-in-progress: the Square Enix edition



DISSIDIA
FINAL FANTASY



Dissidia Final Fantasy

PSP AVAILABLE: August DEVELOPER: Square Enix

Fighting

WHAT IT IS: A fighting game that lets you pit *Final Fantasy* favorites against each other in eye-catching and interactive 3D arenas. It'll utilize a two-tiered battle system where you'll have to first collect "Brave Points" via attacks and then use those Brave Points to unleash devastating HP strikes. Collect crystals scattered around the arena to fill up a gauge that lets your character transform.

WHY WE'RE INTRIGUED: You adore Cloud. I worship Sephiroth. The two of us can finally compete to see who's more powerful. The *FF* snobs out there can replace Cloud and Sephiroth with Terra and Kefka.

WHAT'S NEW FOR THE NORTH AMERICAN VERSION: The battle system has been rebalanced with new abilities and attacks. More importantly, the developers have added a new Arcade mode. Previously, players could only battle with characters they've personally leveled up and customized. Now, you'll also have a host of pre-selected characters to battle with, like in a real arcade fighting game.

WHAT'S MISSING: A Japanese voice track. English dubs only, guys. We're sad, too. Teresa

Nier

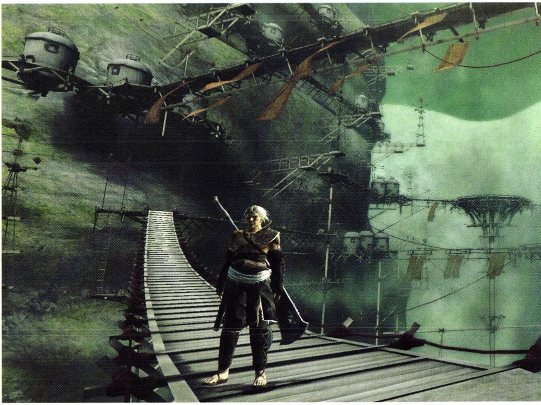
PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 DEVELOPER: cavia Inc.

Action-Adventure

WHAT IT IS: A brand new franchise about a man named Nier seeking a cure for his sick daughter. A dark plague called the "Black Scrawl" has infected the world, and from what we saw, the world is left in a partially decrepit state. The story will be dark and rife with pain.

WHY WE'RE INTRIGUED: According to the developers, nothing's as it seems in this strange new intellectual property. Every poster, every trailer, every demo… they've all been manipulated to deceive you. There are hidden messages beneath all the tiny details you see. Must. Find. Them!

BOOK VERSUS SHADOWS: Nier is often seen with a book that supposedly grants him mysterious abilities. Factor in that the enemies we saw Nier fighting looked as if their bodies could have been made up of torn pages and that the name of the world's affliction is "Black Scrawl," and you have to wonder just what magnitude of power words and ideas command in this world. Teresa



FINAL FANTASY XIII

Final Fantasy XIII

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 DEVELOPER: Square Enix

Traditional Role-Playing Game

WHAT IT IS: The next big step in the *Final Fantasy* franchise. With two settings—the restrictive city of Cocoon and the prehistoric plains of Pulse—and an already compelling story about destiny clashing against human will, *FFXIII* is already shaping up to be as epic and convoluted as its predecessors.

WHY WE'RE INTRIGUED: It's the first *Final Fantasy* game built for a next-gen console. It will be stunning.

ACTIVE TIME BATTLE…*ENHANCED:* The traditional ATB bar will be split into slots so you won't have to wait for it to fill completely before inputting commands. Instead of MP, your spells and skills will require a set number of slots on the new ATB bar. To put it simply, you'll be fiddling with the menus, inputting commands, and watching those commands dynamically come to life in a way that's quicker, fresher, and more engaging than any previous *Final Fantasy* title. Teresa

Front Mission Evolved

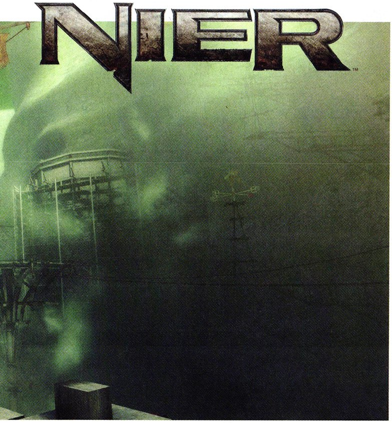
PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD DEVELOPER: Double Helix Games

Third-Person Shooter

WHAT IT IS: Combat action, but you don't take the reins of a rugged treasure hunter or a cardboard box-toting spy. Nope, this is a third-person shooter from the perspective of giant, laser-blasting mechs called wanzers.

WHY WE'RE INTRIGUED: "Evolved" is not an understatement. The *Front Mission* series is known—and praised—for its strategy RPG gameplay…but now it's a third-person shooter? The idea came out of nowhere, and we're curious how it'll pan out.

CHOICES, CHOICES: You'll have hundreds of choices when it comes to wanzer customization, from run speed to gun types. What we want to know is whether there's an option to paint your wanzer bright lavender. You know, to blend in with the, uh, er…nevermind. Teresa



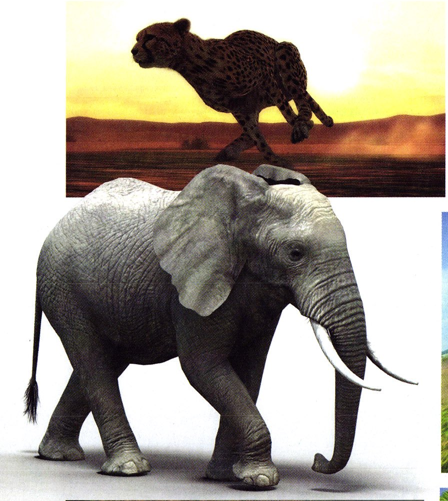
FRONT MISSION EVOLVED

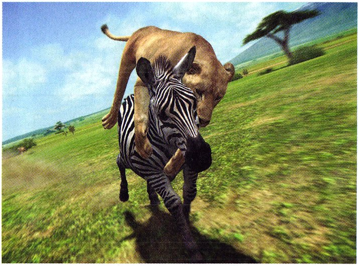
PlayStation Gallery

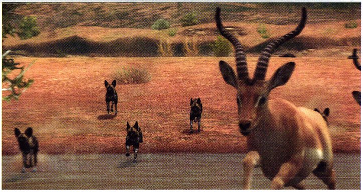
Afrika First Look

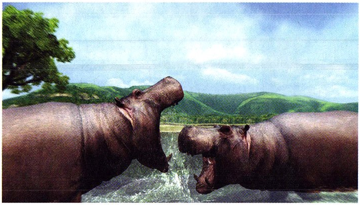
PS3 AVAILABLE: August GENRE: Photo Safari
PUBLISHER: Natsume DEVELOPER: Rhino Studios

It's no secret that people who are awesome (hopefully you, definitely us) occasionally enjoy programs on nature channels. Cheetahs chasing down antelopes, vultures circling their prey…it's fascinating stuff. In *Afrika,* you're a photographer traversing realistic African terrain to catch action shots of dozens of animal species—which all behave realistically enough to earn the stamp of approval from the National Geographic Society. You'll receive assignments to capture particular photos, upgrade and tweak your cameras so they're up to par, and eventually unlock videos and photos from the National Geographic archives. Some might call *Afrika* too tame and educational. We call those guys "gore-hungry brutes." They've obviously never appreciated the cool but strangely elegant violence of a lion hunting down a zebra—one of many scenarios we expect *Afrika* will effectively convey. Teresa





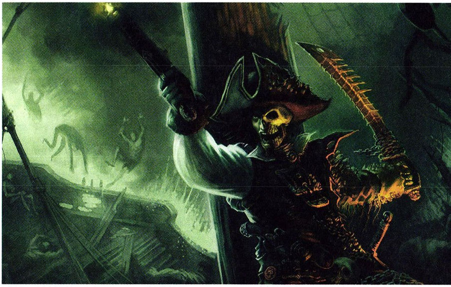




Warriors: Legends of Troy First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2010 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: KOEI DEVELOPER: KOEI Canada

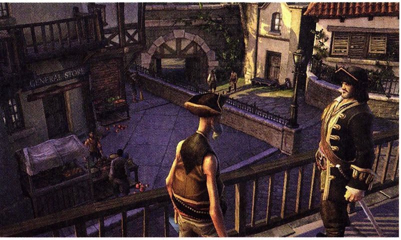
For the first time, KOEI is creating a *Dynasty Warriors* game specifically for the Western audience. Well, sort of. It's more like a *Dynasty Warriors* offshoot. *Legends of Troy* will be set during the Trojan War, and you'll encounter the expected one-versus-many gameplay KOEI is known for. Except this time, instead of Chinese martial arts masters, you'll play as Greek and Trojan heroes, like Achilles. The plan is to throw in a dash of the supernatural (the gods played key roles in the Trojan War, after all), spice up the now-formulaic *Warriors* combat system, and include competitive and cooperative multiplayer elements. Then we'll see whether the *Warriors* franchise has what it takes to appeal to the Western mass market. Teresa

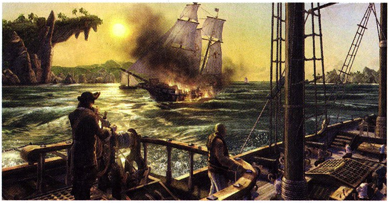


Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall 2010 GENRE: Action RPG PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive Studios DEVELOPER: Propaganda Games

Fifteen years before the events of the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, there you were, an aspiring pirate awash in the *Pirates'* universe of dark humor, mystical shenanigans, and strange adventures. At least that's the premise of the new *Pirates of the Caribbean* action RPG. Dan Tudge, vice president and general manager of Propaganda Games, hints at an open world with a deep character progression system, satisfying side quests, and combat on land and sea. It's not a bad foundation, but we've played the previous *Pirates* games, so we're skeptical. But Tudge reassures that the team's goal is "to finally create the game that the *Pirates of the Caribbean* universe deserves." Ay, we'll be the judge o' that when we do see more, matey. Teresa

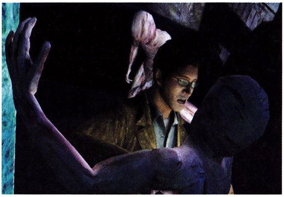


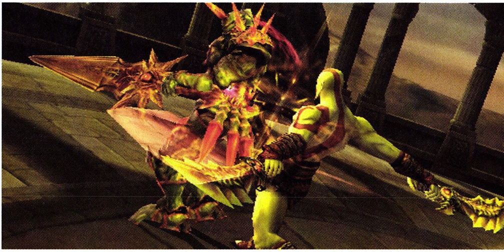


Silent Hill: Shattered Memories First Look

PSP AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Survival Horror PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Climax Studios

This is a reimagining of the original *Silent Hill* game, but with a twist. When you start the game, you'll take a psychological profile test with questions like "Have you ever cheated on a significant other?" and "Does having a drink help you relax?" Depending on your answers—and your subsequent gameplay choices—the game will subtly alter to offer you a tailored experience. It's the little things. Like wandering into a women's bathroom to discover a female character (who you'll meet again later) looking and behaving more seductively. But these small variations could create a uniquely horrifying journey that preys on your own personal fears. Or maybe we won't even notice it. Teresa





Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny Hands-On

PSP AVAILABLE: Q3 2009 GENRE: 3D Fighting PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Project Soul

It's *Soulcalibur IV* for the PSP. Wait, let's try that again: *Holy crap, it's* Soulcalibur IV *for the PSP!* Fans of the series' weapons-based combat will be thrilled to know that the game will be in no way diminished by its transition to a more portable platform. *Broken Destiny* not only plays exceptionally well—thanks to the retuned engine and rebalanced roster—but also retains *SC IV's* robust character customization options, offers ad hoc wireless multiplayer, and features a cast of 20 characters including…Kratos. Yes, *that* Kratos (which will hopefully make up for Darth Vader's absence). And though the Tower mode is gone, Namco reps did tease a new Campaign mode. Let's hope it involves Kratos kicking ass and taking names. Scott

PlayStation Gallery

Quantum Update

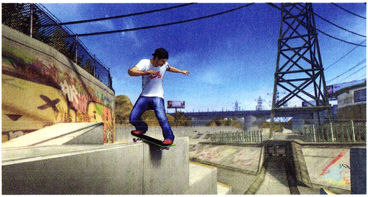
PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Action Sci-fi Shooter
PUBLISHER: Tecmo DEVELOPER: Tecmo

When it comes to creative weaponry, it's pretty hard to top a hot sidekick that you can throw at your enemies to inflict instant death. But of course, that's just one move. For the majority of *Quantum*, hot sidekick Fillena (left) will actually function as an autonomous AI partner, fighting alongside grotesquely muscular hero Syd as they battle their way through a "living" tower—one of several that mysteriously emerged from the earth after the worldwide collapse of civilization. And naturally, Syd's got his own set of moves, most of which are based on an *Uncharted*-like cover system, which lets you attach to an object and then blind fire, lean to shoot, or quick dash to the next piece of cover… assuming the tower doesn't mutate and remove it in the process. Damn you, evil tower! Scott

Tony Hawk: RIDE Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Action Sports
PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Robomodo

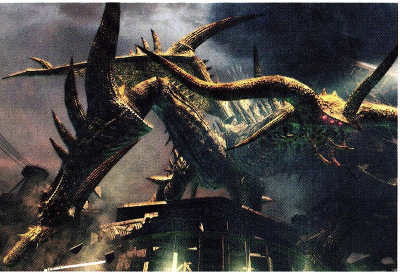
If you were paying attention to our August issue Update section, you're currently laughing to yourself about the "hands-on" tagline up there. Because you know that "feet-on" would be far more appropriate descriptor. That's right, *RIDE* comes with a full-size skateboard deck peripheral that controls all of your in-game actions: pull your foot past the side of the deck to move forward, turn by leaning side to side, slowly push down on the tail to manual or quickly to ollie, perform grabs by waving your hands in front of the sensors, and so on. We did have some difficulty adjusting to the oddly-physical new control system—which currently isn't as precise as hoped—but we still enjoyed wildly waving our appendages just to see what would happen. Now we just have to wait and see if *Tony* can land this new trick. Scott



Lost Planet 2 Hands-On

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Winter **GENRE:** Third-person Shooter
PUBLISHER: Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

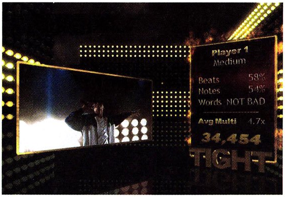
That's right, despite early indications that the game would be a 360 exclusive, the sequel to Capcom's deep space shooter will indeed land on PS3. Ten years have passed and the icy remnants of the first game's setting have thawed to reveal lush jungles…and even more of those pesky Akrid insects (which, once again, managed to escape from *Starship Troopers* and invade Capcom's game), including the truly massive Kimono Dragon creature we had to tackle in our hands-on time. With the help of three other players, we traversed a tightly contained area, manned everything from rocket launchers to mini-mechs, and blew his six slimy legs off before entering his mouth to dismantle him from the *inside.* Epic! Scott



Def Jam Rapstar First Look

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Winter **GENRE:** Hip hop Karaoke
PUBLISHER: TBD **DEVELOPER:** 4mm Games, Terminal Reality

So apparently there's a little-known genre of music called "Hip hop" that all the kids are listing to these days, and someone thought it might be a good idea to build a game around it. Crazy, right? It's a *SingStar*-style game that lets you rap along to over 100 modern and classic tracks while assessing your tune, timing, and accuracy. It also lets you record your performance using the PlayStation Eye and upload clips to the official website, where you can watch other wannabe-MCs' performances and issue challenges for "asynchronous battles." You can even lay down your own rhymes over pre-created beats in Freestyle mode. Who knows, maybe this game will finally put Hip hop on the map! Scott



The Beatles: Rock Band Hands-On

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Music
PUBLISHER: MTV Games **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix

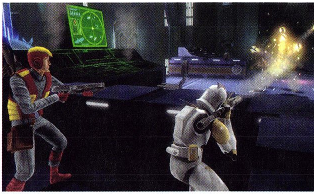
With games devoted to megastars Metallica, Aerosmith, and Van Halen (coming soon), the *Guitar Hero* franchise set the bar for band-specific music games fairly high. So who did Harmonix get to front the first one band *Rock Band?* The Beatles. John, Paul, George, Ringo—the freakin' *Beatles!* The game includes 45 master tracks of the band's most beloved songs and loosely follows their legendary career—starting with authentic recreations of their most historic concerts and winding up in psychedelic "dreamscapes" that capture the band's later years recording at Abbey Road. It also introduces vocal harmonies and support for up to three mics. Singing harmonies is incredibly tricky, but the new songs (and slick new instruments) were a blast to play. Prepare for Beatlemania to sweep the country once again. Scott

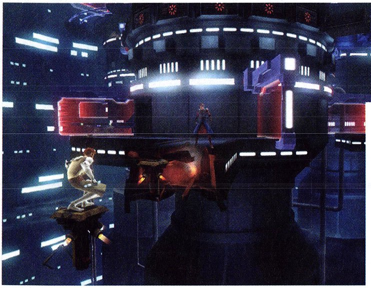
PlayStation Gallery

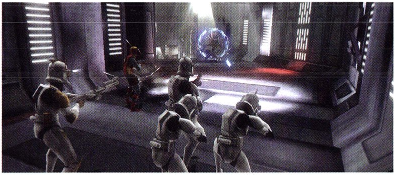
Star Wars Clone Wars: Republic Heroes First Look

PS3/PSP AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Krome Studios Adelaide

If you're in the demographic that considers every *Star Wars* movie in the new trilogy pretty much worthless, a) join the club, and b) you'll have missed the phenomenon of the *Clone Wars* cartoon series (and toys) that, when airing, holds the number one spot on the Cartoon Network, and in toy sales. The new game coming to PS3 and PSP takes advantage of the relationship by tapping some art assets, along with story and writers, from the TV series. It also bridges the time between the end of season one, and season two which should just be kicking off. New villains, eight selectable Jedi, 10 Clones (six from the series and four new), as well as new planets blend into an action game where you're collecting, unlocking, and replaying sections. The action is frenetic, allowing you to jump on battle droids and control them, but then use them to defeat puzzles. It has a *LEGO* game vibe through its puzzle and third-person action segments, but its own unique style courtesy of the *Clone Wars* setting. The game looks on track to satisfy its big fan-base come ship time in the fall. Rob



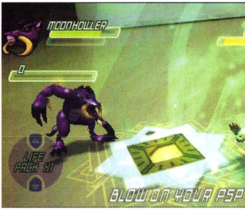




Invizamals First Look

PSP AVAILABLE: TBD GENRE: Monster collecting
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEE

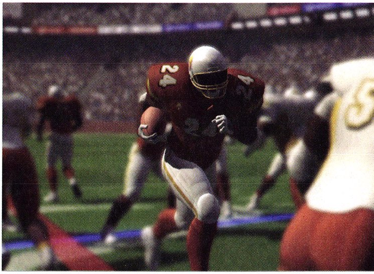
Did you know that the world is absolutely teeming with tiny monsters that are invisible to the naked eye? Oh, it's totally true. Fortunately, a Sony scientist recently discovered that the PSP camera can detect these Pokémon-esque creatures just fine. You can use your PSP like a tracking device to find certain environmental cues—like, say, a particular color—that will cause a certain invizamal to appear when you put down the trap (a star-shaped piece of cardboard). It will appear on your screen in full 3D as if it's actually standing there; you can rotate the camera around it in real time and even interact with it. Better still, you can capture, train, and battle the invizamals, often using unique physical interactions like blowing into the mic or casting a shadow over the trap. Gotta catch 'em all…or something. Scott

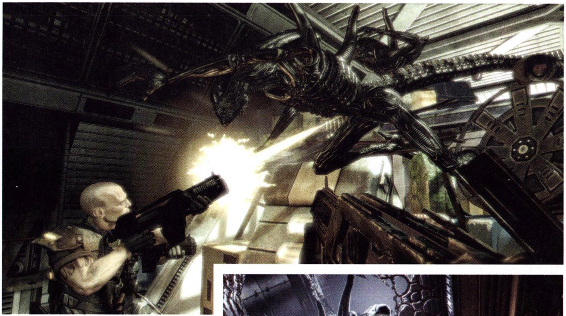


Backbreaker First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: Natural Motion DEVELOPER: Natural Motion

If you're taking on videogame football, you're taking on *Madden.* If you're taking on *Madden* you'd better bring it. After some two years in production to this point, *Backbreaker* brings football action down low with a camera that's more like at the eye level of the players. Distancing itself from *Madden's* TV-like presentation, the Natural Motion folks aim to evoke the power, hits, and athleticism found right on the line of scrimmage. Physics powered by the euphoria and morpheme engines decide whether a running back breaks a tackle or a stiff arm is effective. Each block, hit, and tackle is a dynamic physics-powered event. From the quarterback position, using a simple one-button method to instigate hand-offs and throws, you hit the Left-trigger to engage focus that highlights receivers downfield, then tap or hold X to lob or bullet the pass (the system is still being tweaked so we can't say how intuitive its dynamic action will be in-game). On the line you'll see, in theory, the limb and torso impact of 300-plus pound linemen bashing the crap out of each other. *Backbreaker* has to overcome several significant obstacles to make an impact, like no NFL license (but fully customizable teams, players, uniforms, and logos), limited awareness leading up to its release, and that small matter of the *Madden* powerhouse. We wish 'em luck, the action is powerful and effective when the plan comes together, but it needs to be as easily playable as the team claims to give it a hope against one of the most dominant franchises in all videogame-dom. Rob





AVP Update

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: Rebellion

We got a brief taste of Predator gameplay a little while ago as the opening salvo of this three-pronged shooter attack that's rounded out by playing as the marines and aliens. Frankly it didn't fill us with any great anticipation with some clunky direction and arbitrary mission objectives that I figured would demean a proud predator. But the intrinsic terror of being a barely-armed rookie marine monitoring the inimitable ticking of the motion sensor is perfect gaming fodder. Your pulse rifle feels—and is—so lacking when facing a zenomorph armed with so many natural weapons, which plays with both your imagination and fear of bowel-based accidents. The marine experience is about tapping a depth of emotion that Rebellion is accustomed to plumbing having worked on the 1999 *Aliens vs. Predator* PC game, and its many variants. The Corporation is still colonizing new planets, and when predator remnants are found they're exhumed to reveal alien facehuggers. Time to send in the hapless marines, and when you're separated from your squad, it's bowel-irritation time. Rebellion's own engine is designed to convey the dynamic shadows and creepy environments that blend impending doom gameplay with all-out squad-supported shootouts. So we're feeling better about the potential now, and await the revelation of the alien gameplay later this summer. Rob

STRESS
CAPTURING
ALERT LEVEL
1 08
?

STRESS
ALERT LEVEL
INVIZIMAL ESCAPED

PS3 | Available: 2010 | Genre: Kart racer (and so much more) | Publisher: SCEA | Developer: United Front Games

THE FAST TRACK TO FAME AND GLORY

***FIVE* ways *ModNation Racers* will transform obscure little you into a mega superstar**

by Teresa Dun

THE GAME MAKERS

United Front Games
Vancouver, Canada

The Team

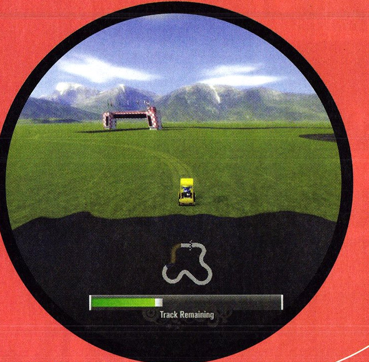
Julian Beak, Lead Producer

Dan Sochan, Producer

William Ho, Game Designer

Mat Thomas, Game Designer

James Grieve, Technical Director



Track Architect

Socialite

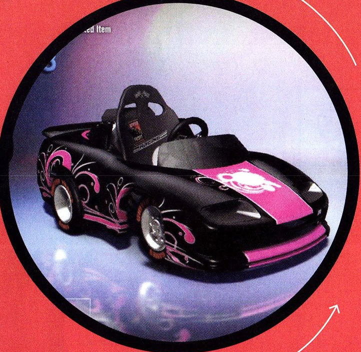
Mod (a.k.a. Avatar) Creator

Everyone wants to be somebody.

Here's the good news: in *ModNation Racers,* you will be. You'll burst through the blank haze of anonymity and into the spotlight of superstardom. You won't just be another face in the PS3 crowd. No, your PSN ID will be recognized by PlayStation fans across the nation! William Ho, game designer of the 2010 kart racer, says, "Every feature in *ModNation Racers* speaks to that fantasy."

Yes, gentleman and ladies, with *ModNation Racers* you race, as you create, as you share—taking a significant page from the *LittleBigPlanet* social integration playbook. You could be a PlayStation celebrity, whether as a creative force, a fierce driver, or just a social climber who knows all the right people. All it'll take to achieve that fame is a little work and inspiration.

Kart Crafter



Driver Extraordinaire

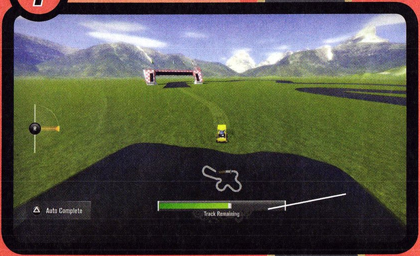
Track Architect

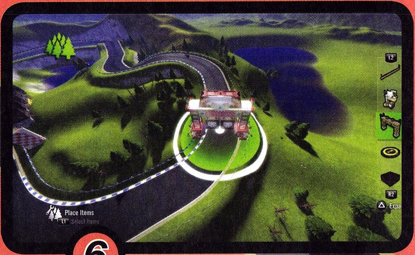
The Track Creator in *ModNation Racers* is surprisingly easy to use. (Much easier than *LittleBigPlanet's* level creator.) I know because I tested it. Build a track that's fun to drive on, then spruce it up with terrain manipulation, props, and textures.

1

A Skeletal Foundation

To lay down a track, you'll need to pick a starting point anywhere on the level, then just start driving! You can go up, down, sideways, over previous sections of track (an overpass will build automatically). Super intuitive. Test and tweak to improve how it drives.


R
Auto Complete
Track Remaining


L2
R2
Expa
Place Items
L1 Select Items

6

Danger! Danger!

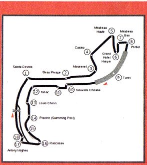
Ah, the gameplay props. Throw in stompers (like the devastator shown), power-ups, barriers, exploding barrels, and more. This is a kart racer, after all, and it wouldn't be right if it weren't a bit over the top.

7

Bring It Online

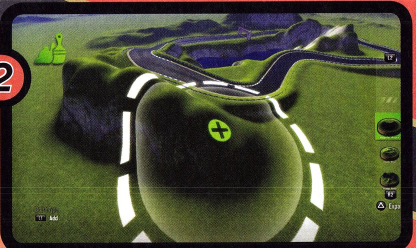
Publishing your track isn't the end of the process. It's the beginning. Unless you lock it (selfish!), others can take your track and tweak it, adding in their own signature styles and then republishing it. Expect to hear more about a "history" system (so people will be able to see how tracks evolve and who's responsible for which changes) and a "royalty" system (so those who put in the most effort to make a track succeed will be rewarded). Intriguing.

DREAM TRACKS


Mirabeau Haute ⑤
Mirabeau Bas
⑦
⑥ Portier
Casino ④
Grand Hotel Hairpin ⑥
Sainte Devote ①
Beau Rivage ②
Massenet ③
⑨ Tunel
⑩ Nouvelle Chicane
⑫ Tabac
⑪
⑬ Louis Chiron
⑭ Piscine (Swimming Pool)
⑮
⑯ Rascasse
⑰
⑱
Antony Noghes

The developers claimed that we'll be able to build pretty much anything, so here's what's on the PTOM staff's wish list.

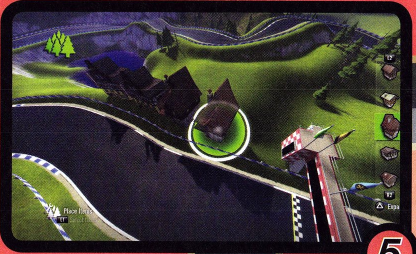
ROB: Recreate Circuit de Monaco (a.k.a. the "Monte Carlo")
ROGER: A Hot Wheels-style racetrack, with lots of loops and "jumps of death"
SCOTT: A *Guitar Hero* note track (what…? Is Scott trying to be clever?)
TERESA: Remake the river-horse flood scene from *The Fellowship of the Ring* (yeah, right), or a scenic leap across the Grand Canyon


L2
R2
Expa
L1 Add

2

Adding Terrain

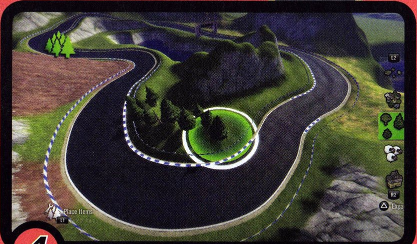
A flat track is dull, so add flavor by creating bumps and dips. It's easy. Pick a terrain "brush" and just "paint" it on! You can pick the size of your brush (it runs the gamut) and then tap lightly for gentle deformations or hold it down for extreme terrain scarring. You can "rewind" if you make a mistake.



5

More Props!

The same way you "spray painted" trees, you can also "spray" down entire villages! But if you're afraid this system is too clumsy, don't be. I started to build a little flower garden behind this village, complete with rows of individually placed flowers (organized by color, of course), a small dirt path, and a tidy fence to box it all in. The point? You don't have to spend more than 10 minutes to create an attractive, playable track, but you can. Oh, how you can.



4

Props!

Now it gets interesting. Just like the terrain, props are "painted" on, but think of it more like spray paint. See those trees? To add them, just select the Tree prop from the menu to the right, and then spray them next to the track! You can manually delete or move individual trees afterwards. The Sheep prop on the menu beneath the Tree prop works exactly the same way.

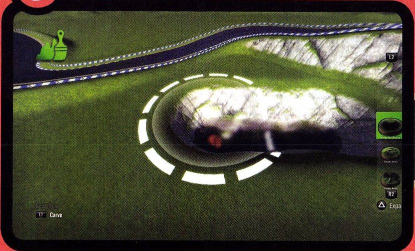
You can paint props so they're automatically locked to the side of the track or paint them freely if, say, you want to build a landscape in the background or even directly on top of your track.

Also, see the dirt textures on the left side of the screenshot? Terrain textures (both on and off the track) are painted on in the same way.

Visual Interest

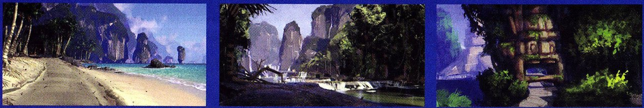
"Reverse" the tool that you used to create hills to carve out lakes instead. You'll be able to adjust the water level, and parts of your track will become bridges if you want to build a lake underneath. You'll also be able to control the weather, time of day, and cloud effects.

3



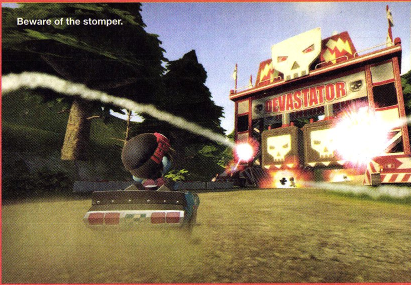
SNEAK A PEEK...

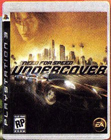
At the work-in-progress "jungle" theme. Notice the new textures (wood planks and sand), props (palm trees, vines, ancient temple), and terrain options (ocean and flowing streams). Should be promising.

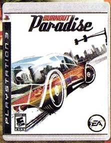


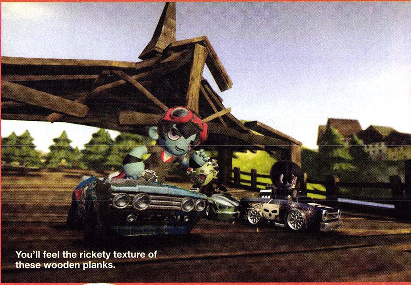
Driver Extraordinaire

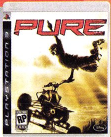
"This is next-gen karting," says lead producer Julian Beak. "It's a blend, a synthesis, of all the things that have been great in other racing games." In other words, *ModNation Racers* is a kart racer…but not the one you might remember from your childhood.

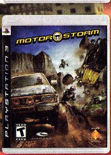

Beware of the stomper.






You'll feel the rickety texture of these wooden planks.





A BELOVED GENRE REVISITED

Modern inspiration

If I asked you to create a kart racer, which game would you study for inspiration? Of course you'd say *Mario Kart,* right? Obviously. But game designer Mat Thomas says, "We want to offer a more in-depth experience, too. There's a level of sophistication we're going for that goes above and beyond the traditional kart racing game."

So what games inspire them? In the course of the day, the team named several: *Need for Speed, Burnout Paradise, Pure, MotorStorm.* The point? *ModNation Racers* will perhaps have more in common with, say, *Burnout Paradise* than with *Mario Kart.* The genre's growing up.

Lovely little bumps

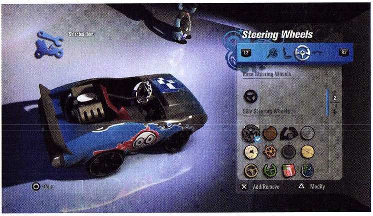
You've experienced this: you're flying down the track when the kart behind you nudges you… and you go spinning out of control, hit an obstacle, and come to a disorienting stop. All from a tiny bump. A poke, really. This happens when animations are pre-canned. But it won't happen in *ModNation Racers,* because the collisions here are all physics-based.

Thomas explains, "We wanted to create a more visceral feel to the racing. When you go down a hill, your speed increases, which affects your handling. It's a lot more physical than you'd expect from a typical kart racing game." That means a little love tap won't send you soaring off the track, but an aggressive shove will.

The team looked at landings, skidding, drifting, drafting, and more. "Drifting is a major part of the game," Thomas says. "But it's a physical drift. It's affected by road surface types." Skilled driving, such as drifting, also fills your speed boost meter, which you can fire off with a button press.

Kart Crafter

You'll have to follow a few rules when building your kart, like it has to have four wheels, a driver's seat, and an engine. But besides that, pretty much anything goes. You'll choose a body type, sprinkle it with paint (and intricate decals, which I don't think I'm supposed to know about yet), and pick details, like steering wheels, rims, and seat cushions.



CLASSIC KART MECHANICS

Bang, bang! You're totaled

To create weapons for *ModNation Racers,* the developers studied…first-person shooters and real-time strategy games? Unexpected, perhaps, but practical. Here's what they learned: Weapons need to be memorable, and they need to offer solid gameplay mechanics, like shields or superpowers. "We're aiming for weapons that people will enjoy using, and enjoy being hit with as well," Thomas says.

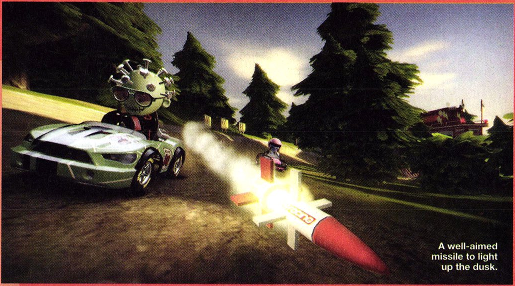
Some weapons I saw let drivers control the timing of course obstacles, like stompers, while others were more traditional, like missiles. But even those had a twist. One missile bounced off objects like a cannonball, meaning you never knew quite what it would hit. (Hopefully not you.) Remember, it's all physics-based.

Dizzy and airsick

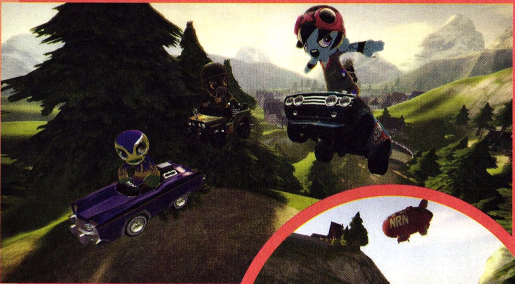
Just because the game uses physics, doesn't mean it's bound by the laws of reality! Expect loops, insane jumps, and other kart track classics. And remember, you can build these tracks yourself. So, a track that has you soaring from launcher to launcher? Already been done (by a non-designer on the development team). A track that looks and feels like a roller coaster? Also done…by me! But the point of the game is that you can do it too, and better.

You don't have to be pro to play

"We want the player to feel intrepid," lead producer Beak says. "We want the player to bump into other players, bump into barriers, go *over* barriers and into the terrain and then jump right back onto the track. There's an intensity in the game, but you don't have to stress out like you do in a sim racer, where if you hit one bump, the race is over because you're not going to be able to catch up. You're always in the running to win, even if you're in last place [thanks to weapons, power-ups, shortcuts, and the unpredictable nature of kart racers]." In other words, the game will have the accessibility and community feel of a kart racer.

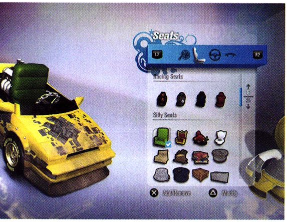


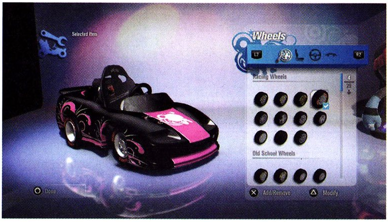
A well-aimed missile to light up the dusk.



Notice how the characters stare at each other? That type of responsive reaction is a key goal of the developers.

Launcher + zeppelin + mischevious avatar? Impending explosion alert!



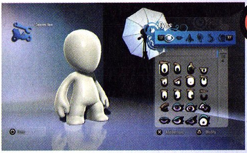


Mod ("Avatar") Creator

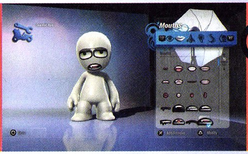
"You start with a blank canvas," says Dan Sochan, producer. "Everyone's working with the same dimensions." They call this base a "platform" and the figurine a "mod." But from this base, the possibilities are supposedly endless. "It gives you some confines," Sochan continues, "to push you to show *your* creativity." So I asked him to run me through the process, step by step, and show me how different the mods can actually be.

"CALL ME CUTE, AND I'LL SHOVE A STICK UP YOUR *BEEP*"

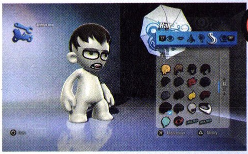
Just because they're small, you think these guys will talk with kiddy Mickey Mouse voices? Think again! According to lead producer Julian Beak, these guys aren't "cartoony or singsongy in the way they talk. They talk like adults." Mature. Edgy. Think *Surf's Up* or *Talladega Nights.* Beak says, "It's like sitcom humor. A little cleaner than 9pm, but still fun. It's a satisfying juxtaposition." You'll see the characters' unsettling expressiveness most in the story campaign.



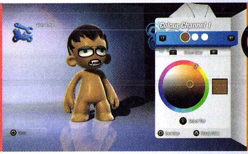
1 The mods all start with the same basic shape.



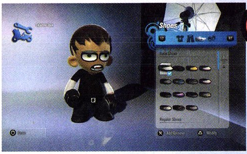
2 Add facial features, and the characters start to come to life. Rotate, scale, and tweak the eyes, nose, mouth, etc. As a joke, I had Sochan blow out the mouth so it covered the mod's whole lower face. Looked cool, actually. I also saw mods with different colored eyes.



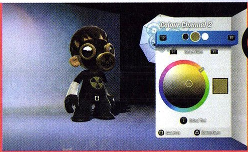
3 Hair or helmet, already you can see the personalities of the mods emerging. Everything is textured, and this whole time, the faces have been animating in a flipbook 2D style.



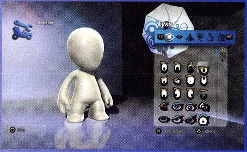
4 Add in a skin color or a skin pattern. The best patterns I saw include a meat texture (so the mod looks like raw steak) and an intricately detailed texture with delicate, thin swirls of color (very artsy).

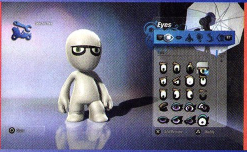


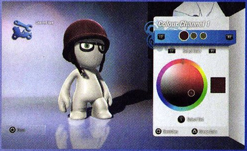
5 Clothes make the mod, and these threads are textured and varied. With the decal system, you'll be able to take simple clothes and transform them into your own snazzy (or monstrous) creations. Upload them, and if others tweak your outfits, you'll be rewarded through the royalty system.

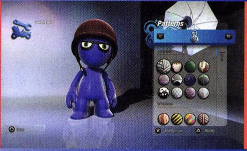


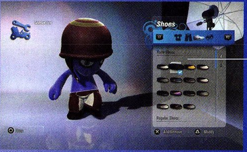
6 *Ta da!* The finished product. If you want to adjust the colors, you can do so on one piece of clothing and then easily "stamp" it onto the rest of your outfit.

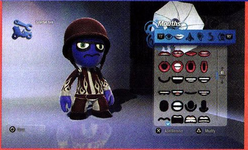












Socialite

Not good at driving or confident about your creative skills? It's okay. You can achieve fame just by knowing the right mods...the ones who're already stars. After all, it's not what you know, but *who.* And social climbing starts in the "hub."

Finding the Best Stuff

When you're searching for tracks, mods, and karts to download, what do you want to find? The best ones, of course! And the ones your friends made. When you meet people and think they have a fierce-lookin' kart, you'll want to search for their creations, too. Somehow, *ModNation Racers* will make this happen via the hub system.

Top of the List

Instead of creating stuff, you may be able to earn a name for yourself purely through ranking other people's work. Maybe.

The "Hub"

"Most games have a hub," Julian Beak, lead producer, says, "whether that's your Pause menu or Start screen. We have a hub design that will be a major portion of your overall game experience... But we can't show it to you right now."

What the heck?! Humph, I'll piece it together myself. To rub noses with the social elite and make a lot of friends, you'll probably have to chill in the hub.

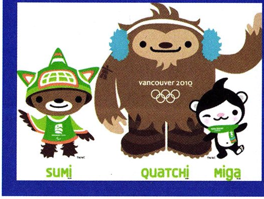
Hub Guess #1

The Hub could be a whole neighborhood of garages. Each person gets their own, and inside, they can line up their karts and display their tracks like train sets. Your neighborhood would be populated automatically with new garages each day: the highest ranking, your PSN friends', and people from recent races. Then, you would "lock" the ones you like and keep them permanently in your neighborhood.

Hub Guess #2

The Hub could be a racetrack. You'd hang out on the bleachers and watch live races on custom created tracks. You could go to vendors to buy new gear. Who knows, maybe you'd even be able to place virtual bets on races and cheer for your favorite drivers!

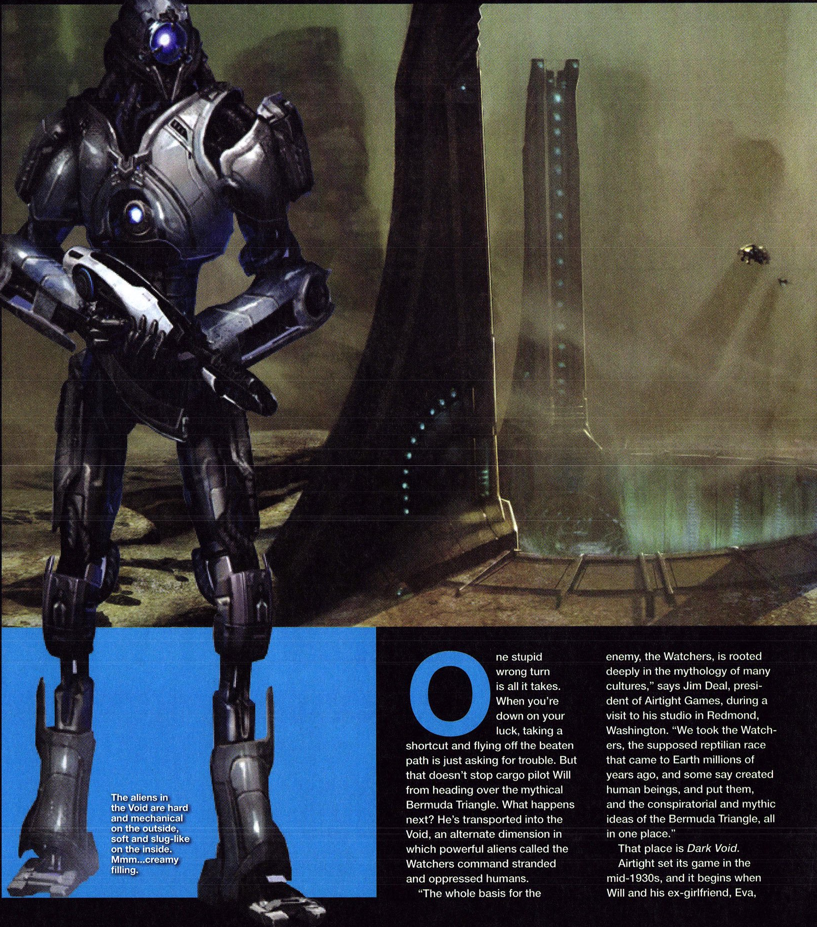
URBAN VINYL



The inspiration behind the character creation system is the underground art/action figure movement called Urban Vinyl. Urbandictionary.com says the vinyl figurines "carry a graffiti artist sensibility." But *ModNation Racers'* avatars aren't the first time you've encountered the phenomenon, it's been in pop culture for a while...

Kanye West's Graduation album cover was created by Takashi Murakami, a noted Urban Vinyl artist (among many, many other things). And the 2010 Winter Olympic mascots? They're also steeped in the Urban Vinyl culture! William Ho enthuses about collecting Urban Vinyl toys. "People crack open the box, rip open the foil, and think *'what's in there?!'* We've taken that sense of wonder, of discovery, of thinking 'what's the next cool look?' and put it into our game."

DARK VOID



The aliens in the Void are hard and mechanical on the outside, soft and slug-like on the inside. Mmm...creamy filling.

PS3 Available: Fall Genre: Action Publisher: Capcom Developer: Airtight Games

One stupid wrong turn is all it takes. When you're down on your luck, taking a shortcut and flying off the beaten path is just asking for trouble. But that doesn't stop cargo pilot Will from heading over the mythical Bermuda Triangle. What happens next? He's transported into the Void, an alternate dimension in which powerful aliens called the Watchers command stranded and oppressed humans.

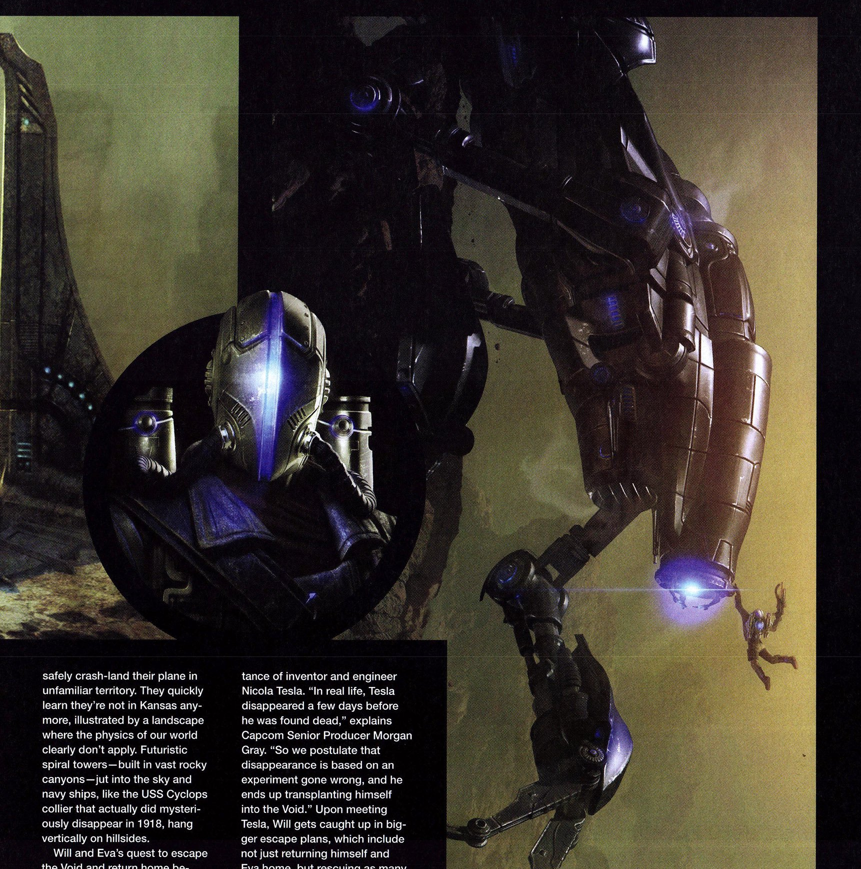
"The whole basis for the enemy, the Watchers, is rooted deeply in the mythology of many cultures," says Jim Deal, president of Airtight Games, during a visit to his studio in Redmond, Washington. "We took the Watchers, the supposed reptilian race that came to Earth millions of years ago, and some say created human beings, and put them, and the conspiratorial and mythic ideas of the Bermuda Triangle, all in one place."

That place is *Dark Void*.

Airtight set its game in the mid-1930s, and it begins when Will and his ex-girlfriend, Eva,

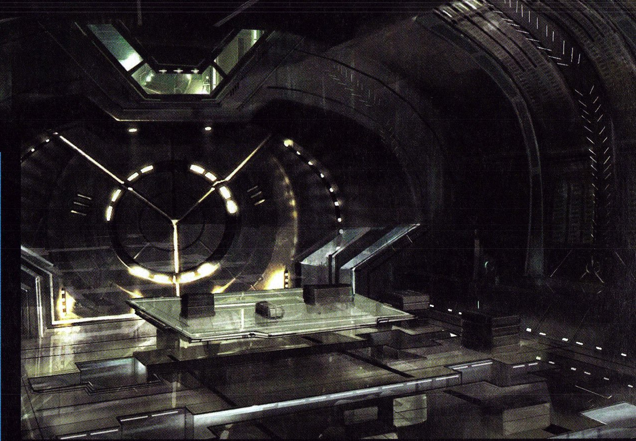
HITCH A RIDE ON AN *INDIANA JONES*-STYLE JETPACK ADVENTURE

BY DOUGLASS C. PERRY



safely crash-land their plane in unfamiliar territory. They quickly learn they're not in Kansas anymore, illustrated by a landscape where the physics of our world clearly don't apply. Futuristic spiral towers—built in vast rocky canyons—jut into the sky and navy ships, like the USS Cyclops collier that actually did mysteriously disappear in 1918, hang vertically on hillsides.

Will and Eva's quest to escape the Void and return home becomes slightly more challenging when they make the acquaintance of inventor and engineer Nicola Tesla. "In real life, Tesla disappeared a few days before he was found dead," explains Capcom Senior Producer Morgan Gray. "So we postulate that disappearance is based on an experiment gone wrong, and he ends up transplanting himself into the Void." Upon meeting Tesla, Will gets caught up in bigger escape plans, which include not just returning himself and Eva home, but rescuing as many people as possible, using a Tesla-built ship called the Ark. Yes, the



As Will and Eva venture deeper into the Void, reasonable, familiar environments like cliff faces, forests, and caverns disappear and alien structures replace them.

DARK ORIGINS

"*Dark Void* started as another game with another publisher [THQ]," explains Jim Deal, Airtight Games' president. "It was similar in functionality with flying and on-foot mechanics, but it had a grapple instead of a rocket pack. For whatever reason, they decided not to go forward with it. So we started shopping our game around and we landed with Capcom. Over the course of development, we made terrific changes to it.

As we worked on it, Capcom said, 'this is good, but there's something missing.' So we came back from that meeting and sat down and talked about it. When publishers say there is something missing, it might be that the art isn't that good, or this or that isn't good, but what they really meant is that it's missing the big idea. And so, sitting in our studio at the big conference table, we all look at Jose Perez, our lead designer, and he turns white [laughs].

We thought about the 'big idea' for a while. One day Jose comes in, and he hadn't slept, and he starts scribbling on my whiteboard. He said, 'We'll take the cover system and turn it on its side, vertically.' Everybody agreed and loved it. Everybody got it immediately. So, we took flying—and remember, we made *Crimson Skies*—and we added on-foot action, and added all this stuff in between, and it felt really good. We threw out the IP we were working on and invented this one to support it. The dark void and Nicola Tesla all came after we got this core idea. So really, we invented a place that needed the vertical combat, jumping, and rocket packing we had developed."

narrative is pure pulp, but it's inspired by the best, says Gray, from movies such as *Indiana Jones* to *The Rocketeer* to *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace,* with its retro-futuristic themes and environments.

PAT HEAD, RUB BELLY, SHOOT STRAIGHT

Engaged and hopefully humored by the wild premise, *Dark Void* thrusts you into an imaginative action-adventure that folds flight combat and "vertical platforming" into the mix unlike any game before it. The narrative gently leads you into combat situations, teaching the basics of the cover system, shooting, melee, weapon handling, and finally, air maneuverability. Incorporating air combat makes a significant difference in how you'll explore and fight throughout its three episodes and 14 missions, and in our playtest, elicited feelings of playing *Uncharted,* but packing a Boba Fett-style jetpack.

Using the pack is as simple as double-tapping the X button, but mastering it in combat is where *Dark Void* gets interesting. Most levels have a linear flow, designed with a healthy amount of vertical space shaping some unique combat options. Once you've overcome any potential confusion with the control scheme you'll dart into cover from enemy fire, boost straight up into the air to launch an attack, and then slowly descend to land on your feet.

For instance, the "Spare Parts" mission placed me in a series of grassy hillsides and cliffs where I pounded enemies with bullet fire from behind cover. When I learned there was a melee system, I rushed the aliens, grabbing them by pressing Circle on the PS3 controller and enjoying a variety of brutal death-kill animations. Then I incorporated jetpack hovering, and rained a storm of grenades down on enemies. This is where things started getting really fun. When the enemy difficulty ramps up, the creative mix of combat grows increasingly challenging—and this is where *Dark Void* begins to distinguish itself.

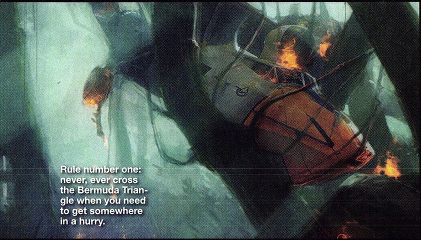
"We have levels where you could fly and fight ground forces from the air, or you could get down in the mud and get dirty—we never know which one you're going to do," said Gray. "Or, in the same space, there will be an aerial battle that leads to an infiltration of ground forces, forcing you down on the ground to deal with that, to a re-introduction of aerial enemies to get you back into the air—all in the same spot. The goal is to keep the gameplay bouncing between air and ground on the fly."

"The way we like to think about it is more toolbox than sandbox," explains Deal. "So you have a variety of ways to do the same thing."

UP, DOWN, ALL AROUND

The jetpack starts off as a simple but limited tool, enabling you to boost into the air (to cross canyons) and then hover down. However, at a certain progression point you upgrade to a rocket pack. The rocket pack is equipped with dual machine guns (and limitless ammo), and enables you to increase speed with a time-limited boost function. You can go wherever and fly for as long you want.

In one mixed combat mission, I was equipped with a jetpack, flew off a mountain trail, and followed Tesla's instructions to attack a sleek alien bunker in space,



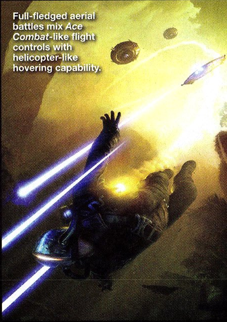
Rule number one: never, ever cross the Bermuda Triangle when you need to get somewhere in a hurry.

During Will's progression through the physics-bending game, his hover pack will become a full-fledged rocket pack.

PULP INFLUENCES

George Lucas' *Indiana Jones* series is an unmistakable influence on *Dark Void.* When asked who loves Indiana Jones at Airtight, Jim Deal laughs. "Who doesn't? He's huge in this studio." Capcom Senior Producer Morgan Gray added, "It's the pulp vibe. Pulp and steam punk, everybody loves the stuff. There is something about the classic hero, the *Doc Savage* character, who is not a big muscle-clad space marine, but who is an uncommon guy in uncommon situations, and those stylistic principles are sweet. It's the Drake vibe (from *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune),* and in some ways it's the *Tomb Raider* vibe—here is a non-superhero doing super things with a cool personality and the ability to be self-referential. From a visual aesthetic, *Dark Void* has that classic look, with inspirations from *Indiana Jones, Rocketeer,* and in some ways *Star Wars: Episode I,* with its depiction of very sparse, sterile, and clean future alien environments. And then, of course, we have the dream of making the very best Boba Fett game ever. [Laughs] *Star Wars* is a huge influence on our game too."

Yes, you will fight this pissed-off, Godzilla-sized, robotic polywog. We promise.



Full-fledged aerial battles mix *Ace Combat*-like flight controls with helicopter-like hovering capability.

the goal being to infiltrate it and power down its energy sources. The camera changes dramatically between flying and hovering, transitioning from a behind-the-shoulder angle that tracks your horizontal movement as if you were a plane (or a guy with a rocket strapped to his back) to the vertical, standing-in-air hovering position. In a boss fight against a pulsing black and blue flying serpent—an exclusive reveal—you're encouraged to boost, hover, and fly in close to fire on the enemy. Once you master the rocket pack, levels that once required careful tactical approaches now encourage wild daredevil-style behavior, such as rocket blasting straight into alien-filled bunkers, hurling grenades, grabbing and insta-killing enemies, picking up a widget or turning off a switch, and then blasting your way out.

Airtight is also experimenting with more radical gameplay design in *Dark Void:* vertical-style platforming. It takes traditional cover-based combat and stands it on its head, vertically. While traversing through the game's early grassy hills in search of energy cells, Will often reaches sections that appear to be dead-ends. By looking up (or down), a series of navigable ledges appear, each one highlighted by a small icon.

A simple button press enables Will to jump safely from ledge to ledge, all of which seem peppered with aliens who hop behind cover or dart away as you approach. Close quarters combat allows a quick grab attack, enabling you to pull enemies from ledges and hurl them to their deaths, but the Watchers are equipped with increasingly powerful weapons that can just as easily blast you off the ledges to certain death.

The combination of traditional ground combat, a fresh take on aerial combat, and the completely new vertical traversing element gives *Dark Void* distinct gameplay qualities to stand apart from its action game competition. Gray weighs in, "One of the goals of the IP is to stand apart visually, but from a pure game mechanic standpoint, it needs to carve out a space it can own. And obviously with nods to its influences, at least with the first game in the series, we want to set a high bar, take all this cool stuff, do it all at the same time, and be jetpack rad."

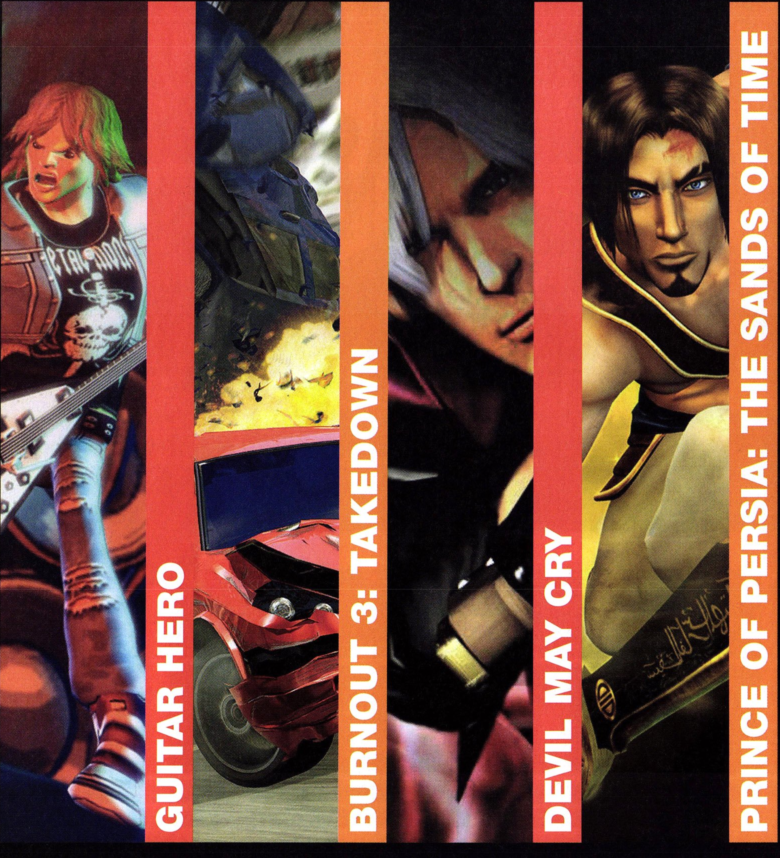
Jetpack rad, indeed. ■

IMPACT!

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
ICO
GOD OF WAR

GREATEST? BEST-SELLING? YOU'VE SEEN THOSE LISTS, BUT WHICH PS2 GAMES ARE STILL SHAPING THE NEXT-GEN GAMES YOU PLAY TODAY AND WILL PLAY TOMORROW? HERE'S A GENEALOGY OF **THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PS2 GAMES OF ALL-TIME,** PULLING INSPIRATION FROM ARCADES, OTHER PLATFORM-EXCLUSIVE GAMES, WHEREVER WE CAN TO ILLUSTRATE THE EVOLUTION STEMMING FROM ONE SEMINAL TITLE.

BY DOUGLASS C. PERRY


GUITAR HERO
BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
DEVIL MAY CRY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Publisher: *Take-Two Interactive* **Developer:** *Rockstar North (DMA)* **Release Date:** *October 22, 2001*

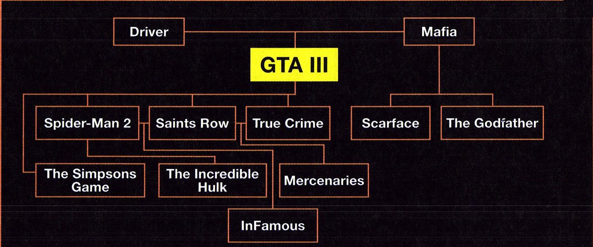
Crime movies from the '70s and '80s such as *The Godfather* one and *II*, *Goodfellas*, and *Scarface* were clear influences on *GTA III*.

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: An unprecedented mature storyline, an anarchic approach to its own living, breathing society, and an enormous detailed world transformed a top-down 2D cops vs. bad guys franchise into the biggest sensation in videogaming. At the heart of this success was Rockstar North (then known as DMA) successfully orchestrating the "sandbox" or "open world" gameplay style. *GTA III's* mind-blowing execution and transition to glorious 3D transformed the franchise and with it, videogames as a whole.

It also awakened more publishers and developers to the fact that the PS2 wasn't just selling to the hardcore gaming market but seemingly reached the fabled land of mainstream awareness. The many imitators discovered that open-world game design was expensive, ambitious, and difficult to get right. Lest we forget, *GTA III's* success also ushered in a new level of development production costs that helped lead to the $10 increase in retail cost to this generation of games.

Finally, *GTA III* fueled intense debate about sexual content and violence in videogames. Just a few years later, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas'* Hot Coffee fiasco threw even more fuel on the fire, inciting reactionary anti-gaming characters like disgraced former attorney Jack Thompson. Inspiring social, political, and artistic debate, is *GTA III* really "just" a game?

GAMES IT INFLUENCED



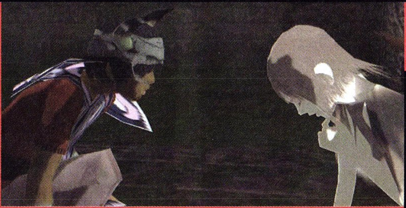
WHAT INFLUENCED GTA III?

Grand Theft Auto* one and *II*, *Body Harvest

The first two *Grand Theft Auto* games introduced a top-down perspective to a vast city and delivered essentially the same themes as *GTA III*—gang warfare, car jackings, a variety of on-foot and vehicle-based missions, and a healthy dose of violence. *Body Harvest*, in many ways, was a 3D precursor to *GTA III*.

ICO

Publisher: *SCEA*
Developer: *Team Ico*
Release Date: *September 24, 2001*



◄ Ico's ethereal (and distinctly French) style has been admired and acclaimed, but never duplicated.

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: Created over the course of four years and originally designed for the first PlayStation, Fumito Ueda's *Ico* resonated with designers, artists, film directors, philosophers, and gamers worldwide, and became a cult hit even though its sales never surpassed one million units. Designed along with Nintendo's Kenji Kaido (of *Zelda: Ocarina of Time, Majora's Mask,* and *The Wind Waker* fame), Ueda's adventure begins with a simple premise, "boy meets girl," but quickly evolves into a surreal adventure filled with many ethereal silent moments, a bizarre fictitious language, and a HUD-less environment that makes you think, feel, and reflect in ways previous games never managed.

WHAT INFLUENCED ICO?

Another World, Lemmings, Flashback,* the original *Prince of Persia
In several interviews after *Ico's* release, Fumito Ueda cited Delphine's PC adventure *Another World (Out of this World* in the U.S.) as his primary inspiration, while also noting that *Lemmings, Flashback,* and the original *Prince of Persia* influenced gameplay and animation methods.

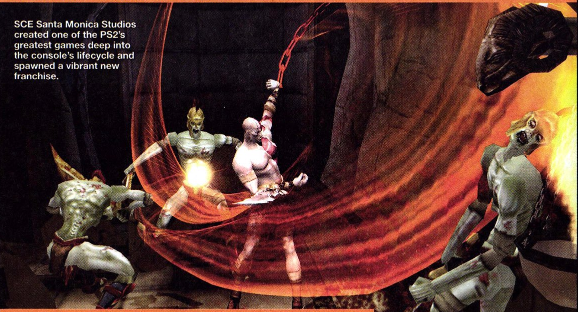
GOD OF WAR

Publisher: *SCEA* **Developer:** *SCE Santa Monica Studios* **Release Date:** *March 22, 2005*

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: Given the current swell of excitement over every nugget of new detail about *God of War III,* it's intriguing that the original *GoW* arrived with a surprisingly low level of hype. However, the fiery eruption of respect, amazement, and awe that followed was instant and lasting. *God of War* was widely embraced because of its original storyline, exquisitely handled mechanics, imaginative use of Greek mythology, and its powerfully heroic atmosphere. It was as if Conan the Barbarian was fused at the hip with Odysseus, *The Odyssey's* warrior king, the result manifesting in Kratos, one of the most impressive badasses in videogame history.

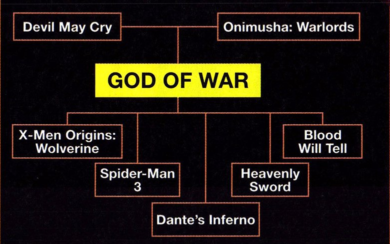
An expertly handled sex scene, successful experimentation with the PlayStation 2's analog controls, an impressive weapon-progression system, fluid platforming elements, and the introduction of quick-time events (QTEs)—sequential button prompts you mimic to progress in combat—combined into an action-packed, adult-themed experience.

QTEs have become a staple in the genre despite initial concerns that the "railed" gameplay method removed a player's free-form interactivity with the game world. But create moments of massive scale and "wow factor" and gamers are happy to be hand-held through the experience.



SCE Santa Monica Studios created one of the PS2's greatest games deep into the console's lifecycle and spawned a vibrant new franchise.

GAMES IT INFLUENCED

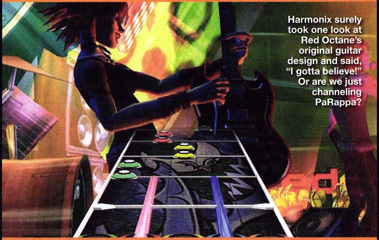


WHAT INFLUENCED GOD OF WAR?

***Devil May Cry, Onimusha: Warlords, Devil May Cry, Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, Clash of the Titans* (movie)**
God of War designer David Jaffe has stated in many interviews he's always loved Greek myths. Jaffe said he was especially influenced by Ray Harryhausen movies, such as the stop-motion movie, *Clash of the Titans,* a mash-up of Greek myths, and *Jason and the Argonauts.*

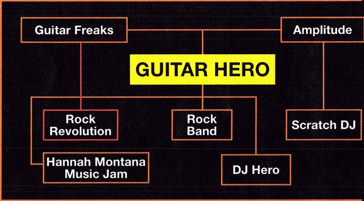
GUITAR HERO

Publisher: RedOctane **Developer:** Harmonix **Release Date:** Nov. 8, 2005



Harmonix surely took one look at Red Octane's original guitar design and said, "I gotta believe!" Or are we just channeling PaRappa?

GAMES IT INFLUENCED



HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: The current vogue music genre can trace its roots back to 1997 with Sony's *PaRappa the Rapper* PSone game, along with music genre-innovator Konami's string of Bemani-branded games for dancing *(Dance Dance Revolution)*, singing *(Karaoke Revolution)*, drums *(Beat Mania)*, and guitar *(Guitar Freaks)*. But when the revolution truly arrived, the Japanese publishers were put up against the wall by RedOctane/Harmonix and *Guitar Hero*.

Guitar Hero truly has driven a revolution. It has set new sales records: it broke sales barriers in January 2008 when Activision announced the *Guitar Hero* franchise surpassed $1 billion in North American sales in just 26 months. It has even infused the record industry with a new means of marketing and imagining their products, introducing new and existing acts to an expanded audience with the likes of Metallica, Aerosmith, and Van Halen starring in their own games.

Crucially, *Guitar Hero* tapped into the pulse of mainstream culture, often mentioned by young movie stars as their videogame of choice. But they aren't the only ones. Rice University has cited *Guitar Hero* as a way to teach science, and rehabilitation therapists from the William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center are using the Wii-enabled *Guitar Hero* controller to help burn victims rehabilitate damaged limbs.

WHAT INFLUENCED GUITAR HERO?

Harmonix's first successful PS2 music games, *Frequency* and *Amplitude*, followed by its partnership with Konami on *Karaoke Revolution*, certainly were building blocks to *Guitar Hero's* success. Given the rhythm/music genre's few successes, it's difficult to ignore the influence of *PaRappa the Rapper, Dance Dance Revolution, Space Channel 5*, and *Guitar Freaks*.

It's the crashes, not the cars, that are the stars in the *Burnout* series.

BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

Publisher: EA **Developer:** Criterion Games **Release Date:** Sept. 7, 2004

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: During the zenith of racing fans' love affair with *Gran Turismo* and racing simulations in general, Criterion Games quite simply put the fun in crashing. *Burnout 3: Takedown* took the traditionally frustrating result of speeding through traffic and tight turns—the crashes—and made them into the star of the show, and in the process turned the series into a major hit.

In short, *Burnout 3: Takedown* made it okay—even popular—to develop arcade-racing games again, and forced long-established franchises like *Need for Speed* and *Ridge Racer* to rethink design conventions and reinvent their gameplay.

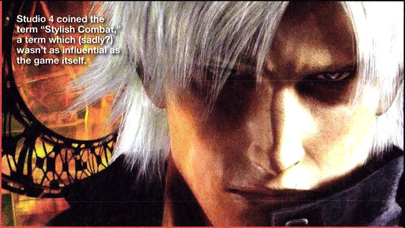
WHAT INFLUENCED BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

Sega racing games such as *Outrun, Daytona USA, Sega Rally*

In the heyday of arcade games, Sega's *Daytona USA* was a monster coin-op system that coupled four twin units together for a total of eight players racing against one another. Gamers always debated which racer was better, *Daytona* or *Ridge Racer*, but if you preferred a bit more skill and control over your powerslides, *Daytona* was your game. The most arcadey racer of them all, *Outrun*, featured a much more unrealistic yet surprisingly maneuverable powerslide that's since become a classic videogame mechanic.

DEVIL MAY CRY

Publisher: *Capcom*
Dev: *Capcom Production Studio 4*
Release Date: *October 17, 2001*



Studio 4 coined the term "Stylish Combat," a term which (sadly?) wasn't as influential as the game itself.

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: *Devil May Cry* fused the actions and techniques formerly employed in fighting and roleplaying games into a new combat experience. Lead character Dante could juggle multiple enemies in the air for combination points using both a gun and a sword. Most action games have since borrowed these techniques including *God of War, Ninja Gaiden,* and the upcoming *Dante's Inferno.*

Perhaps equally important was the light RPG elements incorporated into the weapon progression system. Dante wielded a sword and a gauntlet, both of which were upgradeable through a menu system that worked like a store. You could experiment and customize your weapons to fight specific enemies, based on their distinct attack styles, earning orbs all the while. While similar menu systems were used in *Onimusha: Warlords,* the level of customization and the orb-based currency system—which enabled gamers to earn more upgrades with increasingly difficult and "stylish" attacks—made *Devil May Cry* a terrific, refreshing challenge.

WHAT INFLUENCED **DEVIL MAY CRY?**

Resident Evil, Onimusha: Warlords

Perhaps it was the Spanish wine? The Capcom development team's initial trip to Spain, as it searched for visual source materials for *Resident Evil 4,* also became the inspiration for *Devil May Cry* according to director Hideki Kamiya. As a result, part of the *RE4* development team was split off to form the basis of the *DMC* team.

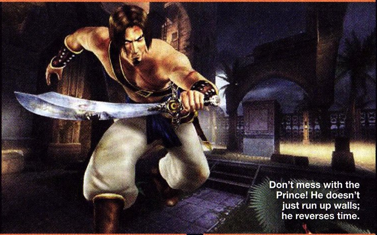
Also, during bug testing of *Onimusha* it was discovered that a body thrown into the air would stay elevated, allowing the tester to jump up to repeatedly pummel it. This bug turned out to be fun and strangely addictive, and a decisive gameplay element was "discovered" and implemented as *Devil May Cry's* new combo mechanic.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Publisher: *Ubisoft* **Developer:** *Ubisoft Montreal* **Release Date:** *November 6, 2003*

HOW IT WAS INFLUENTIAL: Ubisoft Montreal's endeavor remains one of the few revitalizations of classic 2D games that has successfully transitioned to the 3D world; as such, *Sands of Time* sits shoulder to shoulder with such greats as *Super Mario 64, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, Grand Theft Auto III,* and *Metal Gear Solid.* But like *Ico, Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* has influenced dozens of games by means of its exceptional animation, artwork, and production values.

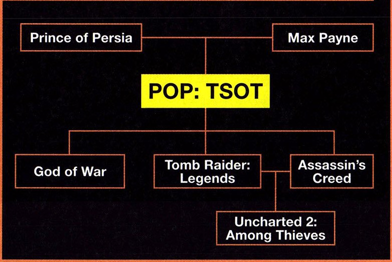
If you want to get down to bare bones, just about every platformer, action game, or adventure game featuring climbing, shimmying, jumping, hanging, and especially wall-running, owes a great deal to *Sands of Time.* Ubisoft Montreal may not have invented these mechanics, but the team did perfect them. *Sands of Time's* finely tuned character mechanics were a developmental breakthrough. The character animations portrayed a gorgeous athleticism that was previously unseen. In many regards, *Sands of Time* so fluidly blended action, adventure, and platform elements—all of which were essentially distinct genres at the time—that the game was nearly impossible to classify, giving way to the modern day action game.



Don't mess with the Prince! He doesn't just run up walls; he reverses time.

YOUR TAKE?
We've linked good and indifferent, weird and wonderful, and crafted genealogies, relationships, and contributions where maybe some didn't exist, where maybe we're overstepping the mark, where maybe we're missing an influencing contribution entirely. What do you think? Tell us at **POTM_letters@futureus.com** and put Family Tree in the subject line.

GAMES IT INFLUENCED



WHAT INFLUENCED **POP: SOT?**

1,001 Arabian Nights* (book), *Adventure,* the original *Prince of Persia, Max Payne

In many ways, the original 1989 Jordan Mechner *Prince of Persia* was the granddaddy of the modern adventure game, which technically should be called the modern "action-adventure" game. What influenced Mechner? None other than the original 1,001 Arabian Nights, a collection of Persian/Arabian/Indian/Egyptian folk tales comprised of stories such as Sinbad, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin, The Talking Bird, The Fisherman and the Genie, and more.

SOUND DECISIONS

Prepare to make your PS3 experience go supersonic

Are you getting everything you should from your PlayStation 3? With the PS3 being the most advanced console system on the market, you've probably already hooked it up to a 1080p-capable high definition TV to take advantage of its Blu-ray–fueled video and gaming capabilities. But if you've merely equipped yourself for the visuals, you're only getting half the experience you should. For the complete, immersive gaming and home theater experience you've been missing, look no further than these five budget-minded sound solutions. Decisions… decisions… **BY ROGER BURCHILL**

Sony HT-CT100 Sound Bar Home Theater System

$299.99 | www.sonystyle.com

The HT-CT100 is Sony's entry-level home theater system, but it sports a number of features that are absent even on some of its higher-priced competitors. By utilizing Digital Signal Processing technology the system does a credible job of simulating surround sound with only a speaker bar and subwoofer. An amplifier is integrated into the subwoofer and comes preprogrammed with sound fields for easy setting optimization for music, movies, and games. Support for HDMI, Optical, and Coax cables offers a surprising level of connection versatility at this price point and the PS3 specific mentions in the instructions are a nice touch. Despite packing a full-function remote, the system's entry-level roots begin to show in the limited-range of adjustability if you want to start fine-tuning the sound settings. Still, the HT-CT100 offers a simple and satisfying sound upgrade that you'll have up and running within 20 minutes.

+ The HT-CT100's Sound Bar has the smallest footprint of the systems in our round up and connects directly to the subwoofer to receive its audio signal and power.

− The petite size of the sound bar does have an impact on the midrange, resulting in sound that's not as full and lush than some other units here.

+ The LED display panel in conjunction with the included remote control unit adds a level of precision and convenience to setting changes.

− Since the amplifier resides within the subwoofer, the cables from the TV, PS3, and the sound bar all have to run to its back panel, which limits placement options for the subwoofer.

SW LVL +6
SONY
SONY

Sony HT-SS360 5.1 Channel Home Theater System

$349.99 | www.sonystyle.com

For a full 5.1 surround system, this budget-minded box packs just enough value into its slender package to make it worth serious consideration for PS3 gamers and Blu-ray movie viewers. The four surround speakers are all fairly small and identical, and provide great mid-level sounds on all your movies and the games we tested. The bigger, bulkier subwoofer handles pretty much all the bass for the system, and didn't sound quite up to the task in the more crazy gaming situations, like the chaotic scenes in *Call of Duty: World at War,* when explosions erupt all around, alongside the shouting and deathly screams.

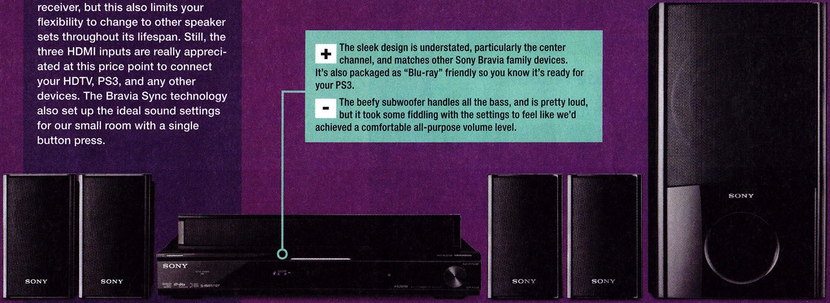
Setup is straightforward, helped by Sony's inclusion of its color-coded proprietary plugs into the receiver, but this also limits your flexibility to change to other speaker sets throughout its lifespan. Still, the three HDMI inputs are really appreciated at this price point to connect your HDTV, PS3, and any other devices. The Bravia Sync technology also set up the ideal sound settings for our small room with a single button press.

+ The three HDMI inputs handily cover your PS3 and cable/satellite inputs. A Digital Media port allows you to plug in an iPod or other music device to crank through this system. And the color-coded plugs are fool/PTOM-editor proof.

- If we're picky, there are no analog inputs, but we're living in a digital age, so it's only a knock if you have other existing equipment needing analog connectors.

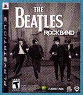
+ The sleek design is understated, particularly the center channel, and matches other Sony Bravia family devices. It's also packaged as "Blu-ray" friendly so you know it's ready for your PS3.

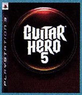
- The beefy subwoofer handles all the bass, and is pretty loud, but it took some fiddling with the settings to feel like we'd achieved a comfortable all-purpose volume level.



PLAY IT BY EAR

Some games have to be heard to believed. The following titles will show-off the full capabilities of your newly upgraded sound system and leave your friends deaf and dumbstruck.

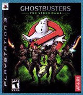

The Beatles: Rock Band

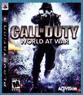

Guitar Hero 5

SingStar Queen

Resident Evil 5

Dead Space


Ghostbusters: The Video Game


Call of Duty: World at War

Killzone 2

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

Music Games

What better way to exploit your upgraded sound hardware than the music genre? You'll sound better, play louder, and rock harder than ever before. Well, except maybe for *SingStar.* If you can't really sing, it could get ugly…and painful.

Survival Horror

If you're scared of things that go bump in the night, you'd better pick up some back-up underwear before switching on your new sound system. Zombies, alien monsters, and… Okay, *Ghostbusters is* funny, but it's also surprisingly spooky. Really!

Combat

Crank up the volume to 11 for these games and your neighbors will think that the Canadians have finally invaded. Nothing beats the sound of combat (and military orchestral music) in the morning… It sounds like…victory.

JUST RIGHT...

Polk Audio SurroundBar SDA Instant Home Theater

$499.95 | www.polkaudio.com

In the June issue we reviewed Polk Audio's SurroundBar system and found it to be an exceptional performer that offered superb sound quality and quick-and-easy set up. We've continued testing the unit and have become increasingly enamored with its simulated surround sound. When a knock emanating from a game (through a sound bar sitting directly in front of you) makes you turn around to check your own front door (that's situated *behind* you), you *know* Polk Audio's voodoo technology is actually working.

A few months ago, the SurroundBar SDA's price point was in the upper echelon of what most PTOM staffers would consider spending on a sound system upgrade. But after living with the system, and considering the balance between sound quality and convenience, Polk Audio's system still seems to offer the best of both worlds at a price that seems ever more reasonable.

Like the Boston Acoustic system, the Polk utilizes a RCA wire to connect the TV and sound bar. The signal isn't as "pure" as an HDMI or Optical connection, but we hardly noticed.

Boston Acoustic TVee Model 2

$399.99 | www.bostonacoustics.com

While Boston Acoustics' TVee Model 2 lacks the surround sound capability of the other sound bar-based systems we tested, its standard stereo sound is surprisingly robust and a huge improvement over standard built-in TV speakers. At times, the dynamic range of the stereo-only Boston Acoustic even seems fuller and more powerful than some of the surround sound units—the midrange and bass response is particularly satisfying—though technically the sound quality isn't as refined and balanced. The subwoofer is conveniently wireless so its placement is only limited by the power cord's vicinity to an outlet. While there's no remote, the Model 2 can sync with the remotes from most other AV components. Physical set up took less than 10 minutes, but balancing the sound for gaming did take the most fiddling between the TV, sound bar, and subwoofer settings than any other system in our group.

+ The compact subwoofer is surprisingly boomy for its size, but tweaking the prominence of the bass range is easily done via the sub's volume control knob.

- We're nitpicking, but it's not exactly the coolest looking subwoofer we've ever seen and it is a tad plasticky… Maybe we should have gotten it in white...

+ There's no fancy surround sound to be had here, but the Model 2's sound quality makes you sit up and take notice. RCA outputs make for simple straightforward connection with little discernible degradation in sound quality.

- A separate power unit means that there's a second wire running from your sound bar in addition to your audio connection to the TV.

Fashionista

Now this is more like it! For those who consider style to be just as important as sound, the TVee Model 2 is available in either black or white casing finishes and with eight optional grill colors.

Glacier
Chili
Onyx
Pearl
Caramel
Chocolate
Rose
Silver

DYNAMIC DUO

Yamaha RX-V565 7.1 Channel Home Theater Receiver

$479.95 | www.yamaha.com

How about this for full disclosure from the get go? The Yamaha/Klipsch set up undoubtedly produced the highest quality, most impactful, and *loudest* sound experience here. But with a 630 watt Yamaha receiver driving a dedicated set of Klipsch 5.1 Channel speakers at a combined cost of approximately $880, you're starting to talk real money, so you expect an eardrum blowing level of performance. But there is a trade-off for such ground shaking sonic power: set-up time and installation complexity. Even discounting the time and cost of tracking down the non-included speaker wire and subwoofer cable needed to connect the system, the Yamaha/Klipsch combo took a good hour longer to set up with no consideration for neatness and aesthetics. If you want to go the whole nine yards of wall installation for the speakers and hiding the wiring, be prepared to sacrifice a better part of a Saturday. The effort will be worth it, but be forewarned: your neighbors are going to hate you.

+ Yamaha's RX-V565 actually supports 7.1 channels not just 5.1, which means if you're willing to invest in an even more capable speaker system, you can increase the awesomeness of your set up by a factor of...two speakers?

- Wires, wires, and more wires...and some cables too. A receiver-based setup offers primo sound, but be prepared to invest significant time and effort if you don't want to trip over all the wires running across your family room floor.

Scientific Set-up
If can't be satisfied by our rule-of-thumb method for subwoofer placement (see Place the Bass sidebar), the RX-V565 comes equipped with the YPAO Automatic System Calibration system. An included microphone analyzes room acoustics and sets a variety of system parameters for the ultimate in performance—with no guesstimating required.

Klipsch HD Theater 300 5.1 Channel Speaker System

$399.99 | www.klipsch.com

+ Hands down, the Klipsch subwoofer offers the best performance and setting adjustability within our test group.

- But it would have been nice if a subwoofer cable came included in the box...

PLACE THE BASS

Subwoofer placement is a key element of properly setting up a sound system, but many gamers lack the knowledge, experience, and equipment to do the job right. Here's a simple rule-of-thumb method to determine the best location for your subwoofer.

1. Place the subwoofer in the approximate location you'll be sitting when playing games or watching a Blu-ray, and power up your sound system.
2. Next, stand at each potential location you're considering for the placement of the subwoofer and listen. Trust your ears.
3. Now switch places—the sub to the location that sounded best, and you to the couch!

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Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice

Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "September Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

RATINGS

★★★★★	**LEGENDARY**	A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!
★★★★½	**SUPERB**	Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.
★★★★	**GREAT!**	A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.
★★★½	**SOLID**	A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.
★★★	**ENJOYABLE**	If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½	**MEDIOCRE**	An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.
★★	**SCARRED**	A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.
★½	**FRUSTRATING**	"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.
★	**PAINFUL**	We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.
½	**BROKEN**	Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues

1)	**Prototype** p. 74	★★★★
2)	**Fight Night Round 4** | PS3 | Aug 09	★★★★★
3)	**Wolverine** | PS3 | July 09	★★★★
4)	**Patapon 2** | PSP | June 09	★★★★
5)	**MLB 09: The Show** | PS3 | May 09	★★★★½

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Neither the most influential nor the best, but the PTOM crew reveal their *favorite* PS2 games.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rob's day job prevented him from playing the bulk of the PS2's extensive catalog during its heyday, but it was *Metal Gear Solid 4* that got him to go back and play *MGS3: Subsistence*. Sure the game is a bit tough on his old eyes, but the gameplay is amazing, and he now appreciates what a talented team can accomplish on the PS2 console. Solid choice, Rob.

NOW PLAYING: *Virtua Tennis 2009, Fight Night Round 4, Puzzle Quest Galactrix*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Ooh, it's a tough call for Teresa, between *God of War II, Okami,* and *Final Fantasy XII,* but since her copies of *GoW II* and *FFXII* were stolen, she picks *Okami.* Oh wait, the PS2 *Metal Gear Solid* games were great, too! But *Okami* is the only one without a sequel out or in the works. So yes, *Okami* is her personal PS2 favorite. C'mon, Capcom, *Okami 2!* Please?

NOW PLAYING: *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite, The Last Guy* (Trophy patch!), *FFVII*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

The entire PTOM staff would have bet big money that Ken's favorite PS2 game would be *FIFA Soccer* [insert random year here], but we'd all be wrong! Ken insists that his favorite PS2 game is none other than *God of War!* OMG... is it actually possible that a day will come when *God of War III* will invade the hallowed turf of the Now Playing section below?! Kratos is more powerful than we ever imagined.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

Carlos the Intern chose *Onimusha 3* because it included Jean Reno. According to Carlos, "Even the intro cutscene made him look like a badass and the words that pop up, 'Jean Reno as Jacques,' make it seems like a film. I've liked him as an action star since I saw *The Professional,* so it was a pretty cool to see him in Onimusha."

NOW PLAYING: *Street Fighter IV, GTA IV, Resident Evil 4* (because it had a 4 in the title.)

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

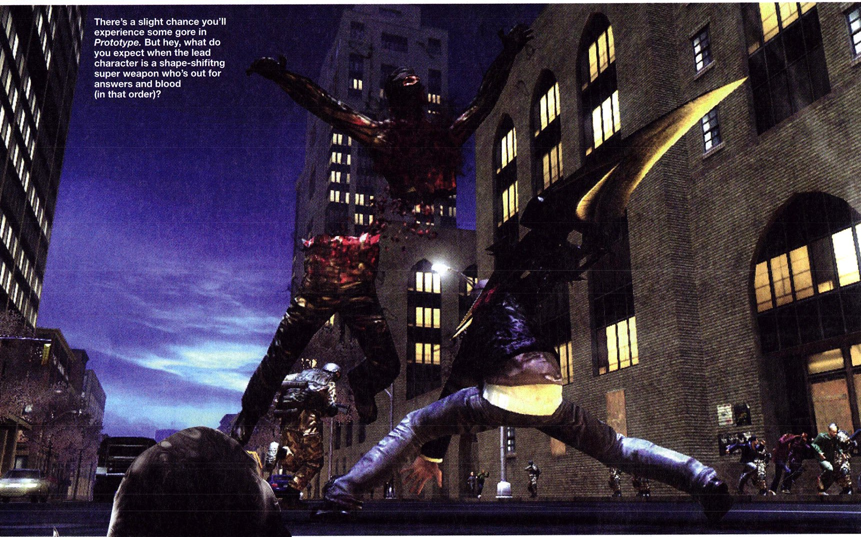
There's a number of great PS2 games Roger could chose from, but he's going with last year's *Yakuza 2* as his favorite. His reasoning? In a year when his playtime was dominated by PS3 titles, *Y2* was the one PS2 game that kept calling him back. It's an overlooked title that everyone should play to ensure that *Y3* comes to the U.S.

NOW PLAYING: *G-Force, Secret Agent Clank, Battlefield 1943*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

With so many great games to choose from and such an extensive personal history with the console, Scott had a tough time picking his favorite. So tough, in fact, that he put it off until the last possible second (big surprise, eh?) When we eventually cornered him and threatened to make him watch Uwe Boll movies, he blurted out, *"Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater!"*

NOW PLAYING: *Prototype, inFamous, Marvel vs. Capcom 2*



There's a slight chance you'll experience some gore in *Prototype.* But hey, what do you expect when the lead character is a shape-shifitng super weapon who's out for answers and blood (in that order)?

PS3 | R

Prototype

Eviscerate the proletariat

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment

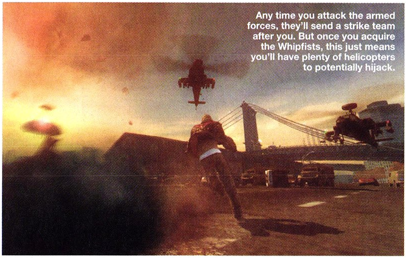
Manhattan just can't get a break. Seems like every week, popular fiction runs New York's busiest borough through some unimaginable new gauntlet of hate and misery: giant monsters, natural disasters, foreign invasions… there's a catastrophe around every corner! And this week, the catastrophe is you.

You are Alex Mercer: an uncompromising badass who wields his incredible superhuman abilities not for justice, but for vengeance. You aren't a morally courageous hero but the victim of a sinister plot who will stop at nothing to obtain the answers you seek—a premise that provides a deviously enjoyable albeit flawed take on the (arguably overused) open-world action game formula.

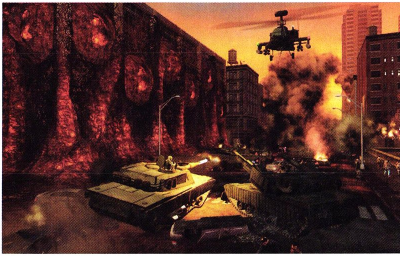
Open your eyes

Following a playable opening sequence that sees a fully powered-up Mercer drenching Times Square in the blood of civilians and soldiers alike (hell of a way to start a game), you're transported back to the beginning…or at least as far back as Alex can remember.

A few weeks prior to the downtown massacre, he wakes up on a cold slab in a morgue just seconds



Any time you attack the armed forces, they'll send a strike team after you. But once you acquire the Whipfists, this just means you'll have plenty of helicopters to potentially hijack.



Not only can you pick up discarded firearms, you can hijack tanks and helicopters. It's occasionally useful, but Mercer generally prefers to work with his hands.

away from an unnecessary autopsy with no memory of who he is or how he ended up "dead." After stumbling through an escape, he begins to look for answers as Manhattan becomes increasingly overrun with an overzealous military force and an inexplicable infection that's quickly converting the people of New York into gnarled, zombie-like creatures.

The story is inconsistent (in both quality and plot pacing) and the cutscenes range from compelling to baffling, but unraveling the vast conspiracy behind both Mercer's powers and New York's violent epidemic proves to be just intriguing enough to keep you playing. Plus, the Web of Intrigue lets you flesh out the universe by "consuming" dozens of otherwise insignificant NPCs, each of which grants you a fractured glimpse of some portion of the conspiracy. It's as addictive as it is sadistic, although not having a way to actually track these characters is an annoying oversight.

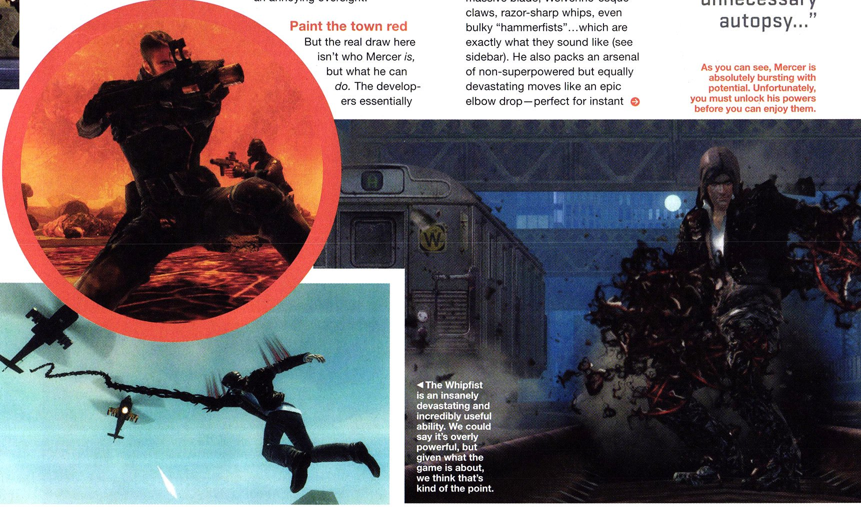
Paint the town red

But the real draw here isn't who Mercer *is,* but what he can *do.* The developers essentially created a nigh unstoppable human super-weapon, endowed him with nearly every conceivable comic book power, and turned an entire city into his personal killing grounds. Needless to say, the results are gory, maniacal fun (especially once you've managed to unlock and upgrade all of his abilities using Evolution Points earned by completing missions or simply wreaking havoc).

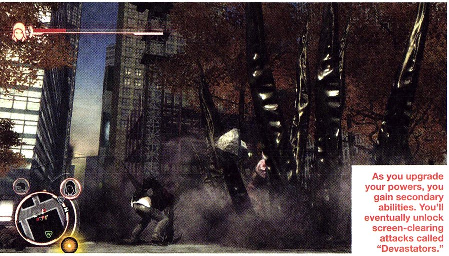
Mercer's arms transform into all manner of awesome kill-things: a massive blade, Wolverine-esque claws, razor-sharp whips, even bulky "hammerfists"…which are exactly what they sound like (see sidebar). He also packs an arsenal of non-superpowered but equally devastating moves like an epic elbow drop—perfect for instant ➔

"Alex wakes up on a cold slab in a morgue just seconds away from an unnecessary autopsy..."

As you can see, Mercer is absolutely bursting with potential. Unfortunately, you must unlock his powers before you can enjoy them.



◄The Whipfist is an insanely devastating and incredibly useful ability. We could say it's overly powerful, but given what the game is about, we think that's kind of the point.



As you upgrade your powers, you gain secondary abilities. You'll eventually unlock screen-clearing attacks called "Devastators."

tank destruction—and a human cannonball attack that can easily knock a chopper out of the sky. Of course, he could also just pick up the tank and *throw* it at the chopper. That would work too.

Mercer's talents extend beyond mere wanton destruction, though: he can sprint up the sides of buildings, survive massive drops unharmed, and parkour over any obstacle (though you have no control over that…it just looks cool). He's also able to glide through the air, which—when combined with the air-dash upgrades—makes moving about the city tremendously fun.

More importantly, Mercer can "consume" any human in the game—a gruesome process by which he physically absorbs his victims into his genetic code. Not only does this replenish a small amount of health, it allows him to absorb his victims' knowledge and to adopt the physical appearance of the last person he consumed. Need to know how to fly a helicopter? Absorb a pilot. Need to sneak into a base? Find a commander. This inspired tool (and its associated upgrades) add a legitimate stealth element that serves as a welcome counterpoint to *Prototype's* relentless action.

The incredible power and immense diversity of Mercer's abilities is absolutely stunning, and because of that, eviscerating Manhattan's masses as they cower in awe feels exceptionally gratifying.

Here comes trouble

Unfortunately, *Prototype* suffers from a number of flaws that are sure to hinder your enjoyment of all your powers. The controls, for instance, lack precision. When you're attempting to negotiate a precarious piece of the environment, the controls will occasionally betray you and send you hurtling off the top of a building, or worse, into a cluster of enemies. The targeting system can also make your life difficult since it automatically locks on to the most dangerous enemy rather than the closest.

Your powers can also feel somewhat wasted on your pathetic foes. There's almost no diversity in the bad guys you face, and the majority are helpless fodder. The game often resorts to throwing everything it can at you just to give you a challenge…but it usually just feels unfair and a few of the boss battles are thumb-numbingly tedious because of this.

And honestly, the city itself is pretty boring. You'll have a chance to explore and take on brazenly generic challenge missions inbetween the story missions, but why bother? There's nothing creative or fun about the world outside of the story. In fact, even the story missions are mostly videogame clichés: Oh, we suddenly can't use our powers for three missions? Awesome! Goofing around in *Prototype* can be incredibly fun (if you can call maiming thousands of people "goofing around"), but it doesn't take long for it to start to feel more like a chore.

Finally, the game lacks that vague but essential quality known as polish. The visuals are unimpressive, the AI is inconsistent, and we experienced quite a bit of slow motion that may have actually been drops in the frame rate.

With a little more development time, *Prototype* could have been a truly exceptional game, but even without perfect controls or jaw-dropping visuals, it offers a terrifically evil time for action game fans. Scott Butterworth

★★★★

Power Play

Mercer's inexhaustible arsenal of abilities really sets *Prototype* apart from other open-world games. Here's a rundown of the most useful bunch.

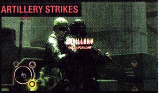
CONSUME: By consuming people, Mercer can replenish his health and impersonate important people…like military commanders. You can upgrade to Stealth Consume for a little bit of extra sneakiness.

PATSY: Take the heat off by blaming someone else. Target the "patsy" and then accuse them of being Mercer. This is also upgradeable, so you can blame someone from a distance.

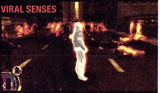
ARMOR POWER: Though it limits your mobility, you can significantly improve Mercer's defenses by adopting the armor power, which, appropriately, looks like a hellish suit of armor.

ARMOR POWER

ARTILLERY STRIKES: Steal the right identity and you can order in artillery strikes. At first you can only launch a single attack, but as you consume more commanders, you'll be able to unleash multiple successive strikes.



VIRAL SENSES: Mercer can access new senses to spot infected people in the city, who offer more health when consumed. He can also gain Heat Vision, which is handy later in the game when New York is burning and clouded in smoke.



MUSCLE POWER: Boost Mercer's strength by spending Evolution Points. He'll be able to pick up larger objects and throw them with more force, creating greater splash-damage.

MUSCLE POWER

BLADE POWER: The blades feel clumsy at first as they slow Mercer down slightly, but once upgraded, you can deliver some hugely damaging combos.

BLADE POWER

WHIPFIST: Mercer can fire Spider-Man–style webbing. When fully leveled-up, he can use this ability to pull himself up to, and subsequently, hijack helicopters.

HAMMERFIST: Turns Mercer's hands into giant fists that add extra damage to basic punches and area affects. When upgraded, he can pull off more powerful elbow drops and launch himself like a slingshot.

HAMMERFIST

CLAWS: The first ability you unlock, the claws earn you extra damage without costing you mobility. These are the do-it-all weapons of choice.

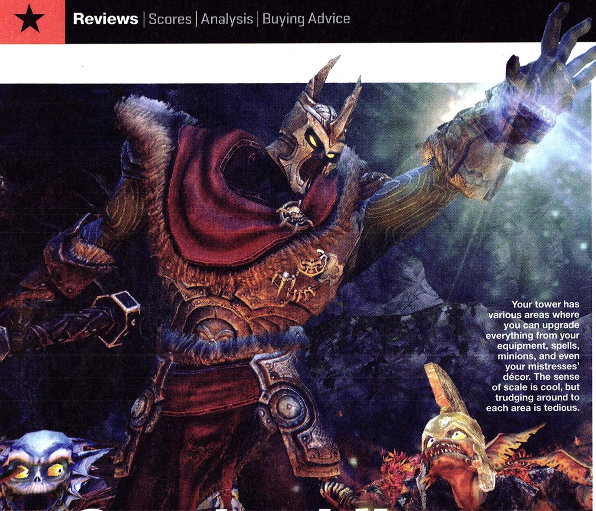
GAMESRADAR 24 HOUR GAMING MARATHON

FIRST HEADSHOT:

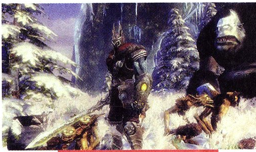
5PM FRIDAY AUGUST 14TH, 2009

* Feel like giving up food, sleep, and personal hygiene for the chance to shoot GamesRadar's finest in the face? Bring it on. For full details on what we'll be playing and how to find us, head to www.gamesradar.com/24hour

gamesradar.



Your tower has various areas where you can upgrade everything from your equipment, spells, minions, and even your mistresses' décor. The sense of scale is cool, but trudging around to each area is tedious.



Overlord II

Middle-earth meets middle-of-the-road

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Triumph

PS3 | R

A fantasy-parody adventure that's equal parts silly and sadistic, *Overlord II* follows a bright-eyed evildoer from his humble beginnings as a bullied kid to his blossoming into an all-powerful ruler with crushing dominion over the land. As the Overlord, as far as you're concerned, evil is the only way to be, and the only question is how evil. Those who are normally adverse to making evil choices in games should have no problem settling in here though, because no matter how sinister the action is, it's presented in such a silly, over-the-top manner that it's impossible to feel guilty (even when your first mission involves clubbing doe-eyed baby seals).

With your four types of color-coded minions and arsenal of spells, you set off on various quests to further your megalomaniacal aspirations, which often involve capturing towns and resources and beating people (and elves, gnomes, and anyone else that happens to be in your way) into submission. Your minions do most of the dirty work for you, and you can issue basic commands to specific minion groups, like directing them to attack a target or moving them around in formation using the Right-analog stick (which also controls the camera—a source of frustration at times).

When you're on a roll, causing chaos and destruction while tightening your grip on the realm, *Overlord II* bursts with indulgently evil goodness. Sadly, these moments are often too few and far between because of vague mission objectives coupled with poor level design. Simply put, you get stuck a lot. Sometimes a reset of the level is all it takes to trigger whatever event is needed to get through to a new area that for some reason didn't trigger the first time. Most of the time though, the problem is simply a frustrating disconnect between generally knowing what you're supposed to do (e.g. find a way to get to location "x") and how to actually make it happen.

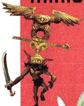
Add a constant wrestling match with the camera system, sub-par AI, a finicky targeting system, frame-rate issues, and pervasive, distracting pop-in (often with objects that are very close to you) and you have a bouquet of annoyances that aren't completely crippling, but often detract from the experience. Although it pokes fun at the ridiculousness of the fantasy genre, *Overlord II* offers the most enjoyment for those of us who take the genre most seriously. If don't know your Grey Elves from your High Elves though, its many flaws probably outweigh its heavily referential charm.

Carolyn Gudmundson

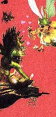
★★½

For the approximately one-percent who care, *Overlord II* contains several run-of-the-mill multiplayer maps, both versus and co-op, with splitscreen and online options.

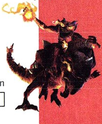
Know your minions



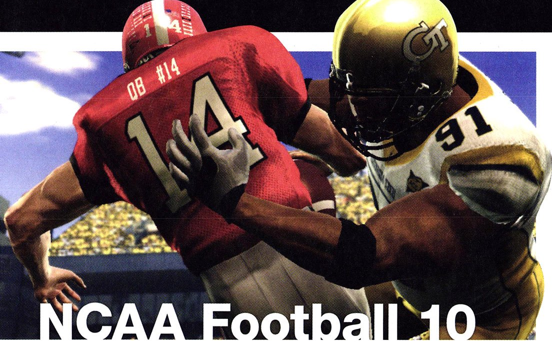
◄ **BROWN:** Sturdy melee fighters, good for smashing indiscriminately.



◄ **GREEN:** Attack from the rear, good for clearing poison plants.



◄ **RED:** Ranged attacks, good for setting things on fire.



NCAA Football 10

EA takes its game to the people

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Everyone **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Tiburon Studios

It's taken longer than anyone imagined, but EA has finally joined the Web 2.0 revolution. This year's collegiate pigskin edition is packed with a cafeteria lunch line of customizable online features and play functions that demonstrate EA is finally getting serious about this whole crazy Web thing.

Here's the good news: Nearly all of the game's modes are online in some way. Boot up a browser and build your own college with TeamBuilder. Create the stadium, logo, uniforms, name, location, mascot, and post them online, or download other players' teams, and utilize them in the Play Now and Dynasty Modes. It's definitely more fluff than gameplay, but the website is functional and slick, and college fans are likely to eat this up. I named my team the State Beach Crabs! Anyway…

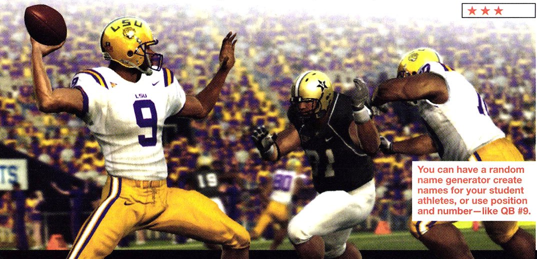
Season Showdown is EA's way of bringing social gaming to the sport. You build credits by competing online and offline (vs. the CPU) to earn your way to a new online national championship. Hedge your bets on allies and rivals with votes. And practice things like sportsmanship—by taking a knee when you're up by a significant amount—or actual in-game skills through user pickoffs, catches, and forced fumbles. Does this massive new feature enhance core gameplay? No. Does it encourage competition and a social atmosphere around the game? Yes.

For those who couldn't care less about frills, Dynasty mode is online, it's solid, and it's what gamers have been asking for. In a nifty move, you can import up to 12 TeamBuilder teams into your Dynasty. Hardcore gamers rejoice!

Now the bad news: Despite new animations, new moves, and features, this year's model plays a lot like last year's game, with very subtle, often ineffective changes. The running game is still far too dominant: With most teams you can just run the ball down opponents' throats. The new defensive lock-on feature is neat, but limited: you can't switch players, and you're left out of most plays. And EA just couldn't help itself, turning last year's Road to Glory into this year's *Erin Andrew's* Road to Glory—a fluffy, sexy touch. Problems pepper this mode, though, from a frustrating interface to being recruited into a great school as a second or third stringer, which essentially means sitting around a lot and not playing. And that isn't the college experience anyone wants.

Douglas C. Perry

★★★



You can have a random name generator create names for your student athletes, or use position and number—like QB #9.

All the top male and female pros are featured in *Virtua Tennis 2009,* including some secret unlockable players.

Virtua Tennis 2009

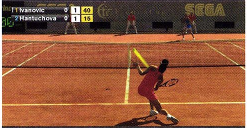
Advanced Pong

PS3 **PRICE:** $49.99 **ESRB:** Everyone
PUBLISHER: SEGA **DEVELOPER:** Sumo Digital

If you're a seasoned pro of the *Virtua Tennis* series, the latest tweaks don't necessarily add enough layers to warrant an upgrade. Most notable is the new view angle that places the camera closer to eye level. "Realistic" maybe, but awkward for depth perception. A full roster of top tennis talent—Rafa, Feds, etc.—is present, and building your own career follows the usual course of training mini-games, but very slow tournament progression. It's all too easy in the early going, but four easy "dings" in the first 10 minutes might intrigue Trophy whores. Online matchups were easy to find but lag seemed to cause the ball to sit up, waiting to be hit by opponents. Two-player or doubles is fun on the same PS3, though, and the on-court mechanic is solid enough for you to consider this if you haven't hit the courts in a few seasons.

Rob Smith

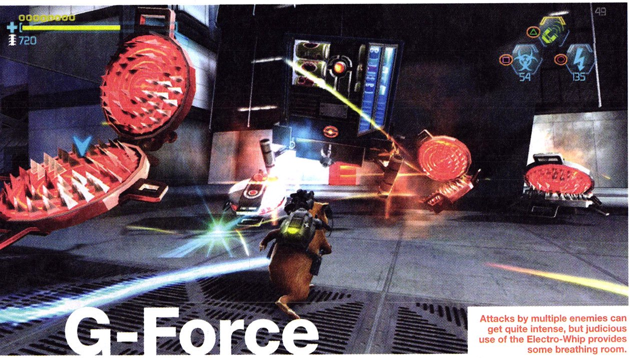
★★★



Down low, the camera angle takes some getting used to.

1 Federer 0 0 30
2 Nadal 0 0 15
1ST SERVICE

On the hardest of the five difficulty levels the top pros NEVER miss!



Attacks by multiple enemies can get quite intense, but judicious use of the Electro-Whip provides some breathing room.

G-Force

Easy now...put down the rat poison

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Disney Int. DEVELOPER: Eurocom Ent.

PS3 | R

Movie license. Guinea pigs. Check that—*secret agent* guinea pigs…with snappy one-liners and attitude. If that doesn't equate to the unholy triumvirate of gaming doom, I don't know what does. And yet, *G-Force* is surprising…

Not surprisingly brilliant or surprisingly innovative or surprisingly challenging, but surprisingly well executed. The gameplay mix of corridor-based shooter and stealth infiltration utilizing furry critters is amazingly competent with solid controls and a weapons/items upgrade scheme that encourages scavenging each area's nooks and crannies. Environmental puzzles even make it feel like you're actually performing some spy-like activities instead of just blasting your furry way from point A to B.

The graphics too are a step above expectations, especially the guinea pigs and their character animations that are eerily life-like and oddly compelling. In fact, I admit it: I wanted to hate the damn rodents, but there's something intrinsically fun about armed guinea pigs and making them scurry about while offing electrical appliances gone crazy! I don't understand it…I don't *want* to understand it, but it kept me involved much longer than anticipated, and it certainly won't have a problem transfixing a kid (the film and game's obvious demographic.) Like the movie, the *G-Force* game sports an optional 3D experience. Two pairs of 3D specs come in the game box and while the effect doesn't revolutionize gameplay, it does hold some novelty appeal. Once you're over the "neato" factor, simply uncheck the 3D box in the display menu to revert to the standard graphics mode.

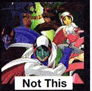
Where *G-Force* does fall short is in level variety. The meat of the game centers on infiltrating corporate-themed industrial complexes and the range of environments is limited to generic offices, boardrooms, computer stations, and unremarkable lab or production facilities. A few rail shooter-type segments break up the gameplay, but there's never a significant change in scenery, so get used to the idea of investigating a *lot* of air ducts—but it sort of makes sense as that's where you'd figure secret agent guinea pigs would spend most of their time.

Face it, there's not a hardcore gamer amongst you who'd go out and pick up *G-Force* for your primetime gaming pleasure. You're going to pick it up or rent it because your kid, little bro' or sis, saw the movie and wants to play the game. The nice surprise is that it's entertaining and polished enough that you're not gonna need to swill that rat poison you were initially planning on feeding to the guinea pigs. Roger Burchill

★★★½

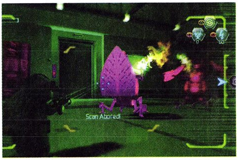
Coming to a theater near you...

This


Not This

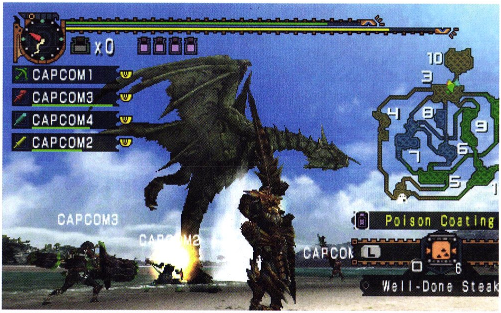
G-Force
Opens: July 24
Studio: Walt Disney Pictures

Considering the number of '70s and '80s animated TV series that have made or are making the leap to the big screen, it's not too surprising that our initial reaction upon hearing about the *G-Force* film was, "Really, they're making a *Battle of the Planets* movie?" So imagine our surprise when we clicked on a preview trailer to discover that this G-Force is about a team of guinea pigs trained in the latest espionage arts. "WTF?!" basically sums up our reaction, but thanks to its blend of kid-friendly spy action and cutting-edge 3D presentation we have the sneaking feeling that Disney is about to show us once again why they make gadzillions of dollars and we don't.



Scanning enemies and items can reveal important information, but be sure to initiate your scan *prior* to combat.

Thermal Imaging Headgear
Protective Eyewear with lime green tint: safe *and* stylish.
Electro-Whip weapons system
Mini Maglite: $9.99
Darth Vader-esque control panel with no discernible function



Chop off the dragon's wing or tail to harvest extra goodies.

Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

You could get lost in this one...

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

The *Monster Hunter* franchise is so hot in Japan that the latest release sold three million copies in just over a year. So why hasn't the *Monster Hunter* phenomenon caught fire on our side of the Pacific?

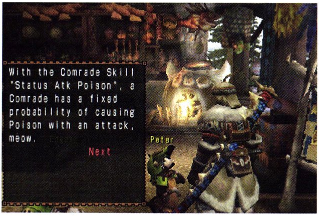
After diving into *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite,* I understand why. Three reasons: a slow start, a steep difficulty curve, and so much depth you could drown in it. Play this action-RPG for five hours, and you get through the tutorial. Play it for 10, and you merely scratch the surface of the weapons, crafting system, and plethora of items. Play it for 20, and you're hooked. You'll eat up the other 500+ hours waiting for you—ignoring some real flaws that will seemingly become insignificant (hardcore fans would argue "beneficial")—like chunky camera controls ("You're supposed to use your index finger on the D-pad while moving with the analog nub, you nub!") and the lack of a lock-on system ("It's easier to hack off individual monster parts that way!")

The premise is simple: You hunt monsters (ya think?). Missions usually take, at minimum, 30 minutes, so during hunts you have to use your wits to survive. Monsters flee across the map, so you mark them with a paintball and chase them. When you get cold in the mountains or need a health potion you gather herbs or go fishing or catch bugs, and craft potions to drink. The longer you hunt, the hungrier you get, so you take out your BBQ spit and roast some meat (a timing mini-game). And on it goes! Hunt with three friends in ad hoc multiplayer (the way the game's really meant to be played), and once you're sucked in, you're *in.*

MHFU is an expansion pack that features new monsters, missions, and equipment (the full *Monster Hunter Freedom 2* game is also included), but the biggest difference is the addition of a Felyne partner to help you in single-player battles, making the game much more accessible. It's the best *Monster Hunter* game yet.

Teresa Dun

★★★★



With the Comrade Skill
"Status Atk Poison", a
Comrade has a fixed
probability of causing
Poison with an attack,
meow.

Wordy explanations seem to spew from every NPC, but they're necessary for such a complicated game.

Ratchet's been framed! Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to clear his name.

Secret Agent Clank

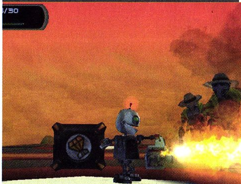
You only live twice

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sanzaru Games

A year after infiltrating the PSP, *Secret Agent Clank* sets its sights on the PS2. Equipped with graphics upgrades like improved textures, lighting, and effects, *Clank* does sport a freshened and massaged look, but never quite shakes the impression of being a blown-up PSP game. The gameplay is still an entertaining and challenging mix of stealth and platform action-adventure elements, but the incorporation of the PS2 controller's second analog stick to handle camera view duties is a major improvement over the PSP version's shoulder-button–based system. If you haven't played *Secret Agent Clank* before, these small but significant tweaks make the PS2 version the one to pick. But this *Agent's* worst kept secret and best attribute is its price—half that of the PSP game—which means PS2 owners should be lining up to sign-on for this mission.

Roger Burchill

★★★½



Clank looks positively stylin' in his tuxedo and with his fancy new flame effects.

PSP
PS2

MULTIPLAYER BETA REPORT

Uncharted 2

CARLOS THE INTERN HIDES AMONG THIEVES

With excitement about *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* mounting after its E3 showcase had most of us grasping for new superlatives, we couldn't wait to dive in to the multiplayer test levels. We sent Carlos on point, and he returned with maps, tips, and tactics straight from the front lines.

Before you start

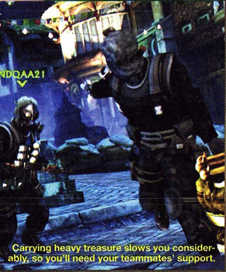
Boosters are loadout benefits you don't need to earn, and you can select a combination that matches your play style. You choose them by going to your profile (Square button).

SLOT 1

POINT AND SHOOT • Increase Pistol blindfire accuracy
FROM THE HIP • Increase Long Gun blindfire accuracy
SURE SHOT • Better accuracy when aiming Pistol
DOWN THE IRONS • Better accuracy when aiming Long Gun

SLOT 2

BANDOLEER • Carry more ammo
SCAVENGER • Get more ammo from each pick up
KEEP FIRING • More bullets in each clip



Carrying heavy treasure slows you considerably, so you'll need your teammates' support.

Cooperative Mode: Nepal Warzone

Get a couple of friends and give the co-op mode a shot. It sets a very cool bar for the final game.

- Find cover and reload constantly.
- It's best to play with three players, as the level gets increasingly harder.
- Characters include Drake, newcomer Chloe, and Sully.
- Enemies drop treasure!
- There are only two situations where you use both characters: when you have to climb to the second floor of the house in the second section, and when you set the bookcase up against the bus. Other than that, Drake moves all the bookcases by himself.
- When the heavily armored enemies start to appear, try to shoot off their helmets.
- As soon as you get over the first wall there is building on the left you can enter. In a dark corner is the Desert 5 handgun that can kill normal enemies with one bullet and heavily armored ones with two or three shots. It only holds eight bullets, however.
- In a section after you run across a bus, have somebody stay near the bus. Enemies will approach, providing the opportunity to get in five melee attacks to earn the PUNCH OUT award (or just shoot them and watch how funny they look as they flop to the ground.)
- In the same section with the bus there is a wall next to the truck with a blue drainpipe, climb the drainpipe to the top to snag a FAL weapon.
- When you need to blow up a wall with a rocket launcher, you have to take the weapon from an enemy.
- When you pass the blown wall be cautious, as enemies will drop from the ceiling and attack from the other side of the street. These enemies have riot shields and the ability to choke your buddies. If a friend is choking they cannot escape by themselves.
- You cannot punch an enemy that's choking your friend! You can only shoot!
- You'll get the LET'EM GO reward if you shoot an enemy that's choking your friend.

Competitive Mode: Plunder and Team Deathmatch

Vote for which mode and map you want to play in the lobby. We prefer Plunder right now.

- There are only two maps: The Plaza and The Village.
- All the players waiting can vote on which map and mode to play.
- The FAL and the AK-47 are the most abundant weapons; all the other types need to be scavenged.
- The lack of ammo for the Handgun explains why it isn't used much.
- To taunt, hold X.
- Take the machine gun (long) booster.
- If a grenade explodes close to you it will cause your ears to ring!
- If one of your own teammates kills you often, a screen will pop up asking if you want to "Forgive Them" or "Kick Them Out."
- In the Plaza, a helicopter flies across the map, peppering the battlefield with hot lead.
- In both the village and plaza, it might rain!
- Unlike in Cooperative mode where you can close in on a target and melee attack using classic moves like the dropkick and a kick to the groin, in Competitive mode NEVER run towards someone that's shooting at you, even if they're close. Use melee if you can get the drop on an unaware enemy, but remember the adage, don't bring a knife (or your fists) to a gunfight.

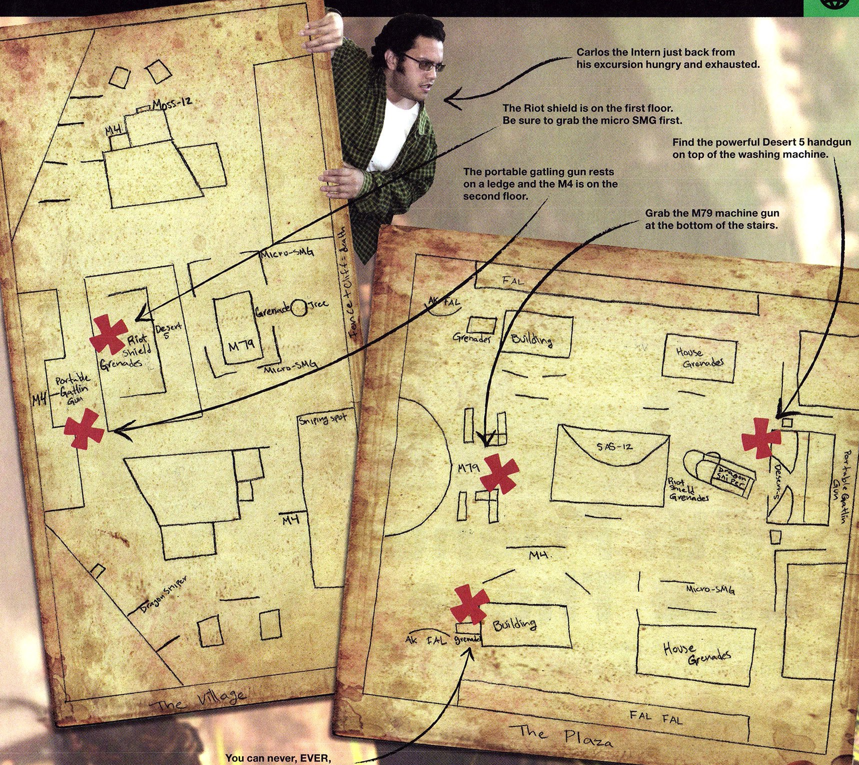
Plunder

Just like capture the flag, except the flag is a heavy chunk of treasure. To capture the treasure you have to pick it up and carry it back to your base. But you can still shoot while holding the treasure.

The Plaza map is a bit harder because the chest you deposit the treasure in is on the second floor. An effective tactic is to pick up the treasure and throw it, far into your territory or to a friend. This eats up a lot of ground and keeps it farther away from the enemy.

NDI Taylor
NDI Justin

In your profile options you can choose which hero and villain character to use as the default.



Moss-12
M4
Micro-SMG
Grenade Tree
Fence + Cliff = death
M79
Micro-SMG
Desert 5
Riot Shield Grenades
Portable Gatlin Gun
M4
Sniping spot
M4
Dragon Sniper
The Village
FAL
AK FAL
Grenades
Building
House Grenades
SAS-12
M79
Dragon Sniper
Riot Shield Grenades
Desert 5
Portable Gatlin Gun
M4
Micro-SMG
Building
AK FAL grenade
House Grenades
FAL FAL
The Plaza

Carlos the Intern just back from his excursion hungry and exhausted.

The Riot shield is on the first floor. Be sure to grab the micro SMG first.

Find the powerful Desert 5 handgun on top of the washing machine.

The portable gatling gun rests on a ledge and the M4 is on the second floor.

Grab the M79 machine gun at the bottom of the stairs.

You can never, EVER, have too many grenades. Know their locations.

Can you earn all the Rewards?

Levelling up is achieved by earning money with kills and this fun stuff...

BBQ • Kill someone with a propane tank

ASSISTANT • Deathmatch: Help somebody kill an enemy. Plunder: Help somebody capture the treasure

AFTERLIFE • Kill somebody after you've been killed

GUNSLINGER • Kill enough people with the handgun

DOUBLE DOWN • Kill two people at the same time (or close enough)

STREAK • Kill five people

DROP IT • Kill an enemy taking the treasure

CAPTURED • Plunder: Get a treasure back to your base

BIG BRAWLS • Pull or kick somebody off a ledge

FISTICUFFS • Punch two people

OTHER APPARENTLY OBTAINABLE REWARDS:

BIG BRAWLS • Melee five enemies

COMMANDO • Get five Machine gun kills

TRIPLED • Get three kills at once

CONNECT FOUR • Get four kills at once

FURY • Kill 10 enemies in a row

RAGE • Kill 15 enemies in a row

RAMPAGE • Kill 20 enemies in a row

TREASURE HUNTER • Collect five pieces of treasure

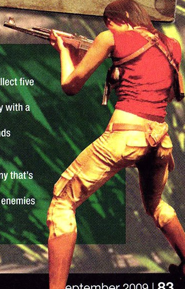
BIG BANG • Kill an enemy with a rocket launcher

MEDIC • Revive five friends

CO-OP REWARDS:

LET'EM GO • Kill an enemy that's choking a friend

PUNCH OUT • Melee five enemies



Being *Resident Evil 5* teammates means always getting your favorite seat in the airboat, without even having to ask.

Online "Nice Guy" Partner Rating

☺☺☺☺☺	Terrific specimen of humanity
☺☺☺☺	Good people
☺☺☺	Still human...
☺☺	Kind of a jerk, actually
☺	OMG, what a douche bag!

With Friends Like These...

A ridiculously subjective look at the online communities of six of our favorite games

By Paul Ryan

No matter how much you enjoy a game, nothing can ruin your online experience like the seething masses of the Internet. Ultimately, when you play online, you're at the mercy of your fellow gamers, and as you may be aware, not everyone is as pleasant as your typical PTOM reader. With this in mind, we set out to rate some of our favorite multiplayer games according to the character of their typical players in an effort to separate the virtual utopias from the insular bastions of hate, anarchy, and not showering. It was a dangerous mission, but somebody had to do it.

Resident Evil 5

Mode: Co-op

Rating: ☺☺☺☺☺

Resident Evil players are generally very helpful, but more importantly, they realize that both players must be present in order to open many of the doors in the game—a clever design decision that may be responsible for creating one of the friendliest co-op communities out of all the games we played. Our partners accepted us even though we tried one of the most irksome co-op tactics we could think of: starting a new character.

Player: *You have no guns?*
PTOM: *I have no guns…uh, this is the first time I've played.*
Player: *You haven't played before?*
PTOM: *I haven't played before.*
Player: *Have you played the demo?*
PTOM: *No, I never played the demo.*
Player: *I will protect you.*

Sure, it took our partner a few tries to understand that we'd joined a game without any weapons (frankly, it didn't make sense to us either), but we still became fast friends. We were careful to offer our thanks for his stalwart protection and gameplay tips, which helped earn *RE5* a 5 out of 5 rating.

PTOM: *Thanks!*
Player: *You can actually say that.*
PTOM: *…thanks?*
Player: *Hold down Circle button and then hit right on the D-pad. That's it.*
Chris Redfield: *Thanks.*

Resistance 2

Mode: Co-op

Rating: ☺

Resistance 2 casts you as one of three classes who must work together as a squad to take on hordes of AI-controlled Chimera. With teamwork being the crux of any successful campaign, we expected to encounter some grizzled groups of players, so we put our best foot forward to let them know we take *Resistance* seriously.

PTOM: *Hi, guys. Just want to say that I'm glad to be a part of the team. I've been doing a lot of practicing lately and I'm going to give it my all. I don't expect it to be easy or for all of us to come back alive, but if we all stick*

Soldiers in *Resistance 2* can stand toe-to-toe with towering Chimera, but rely on the Special Ops class for their ammo supply.

together, watch each other's backs and keep our heads cool, I might rank up.
The team: *...*

When our pep talk elicited no response, we switched to Special Ops—the class responsible for distributing ammo—and tossed all of our supplies to a single medic for the next 20 minutes. Still, nobody grabbed a headset to yell at us. But we eventually found this guy:

Unidentified female voice: *Charlie, stop playing. Listen to me, I'm serious. [Muffled noises from the microphone.] Stop playing right now!*
Player 1: *I'm sorry. It's my mom.*
PTOM: *Do you have to stop playing?*
Player 1: *No, it's OK, she left.*
PTOM: *OK, great.*
[Player 1 quits the game]

There you have it. Despite the complex goals at stake and the serious cooperation required, *Resistance 2* players don't talk because their mothers won't let them. We have to lower the score because nobody would speak with us...but we understand why. Moms are tough.

Killzone 2

Mode: Warzone

Rating: ☺☺☺☺

We jumped right into a full 32-player game, eager to ask our teammates if they have any tips for the duck calls we'd been working on. It turns out that using 15 of your very closest teammates as critics doesn't work when most of them are too busy with each other to notice your sultry squawking.

PTOM: *Quack!*
[We get shot by our own teammate]
Teammate 1: *Get out of here dude [speaking to Teammate 3]*
Teammate 2: *Dude [also speaking to Teammate 3]*
Teammate 1: *Dude, dude. Dude!*
Teammate 2: *You want to get kicked again?*
PTOM: *Quack!*
Teammate 3: *Sorry, I can't tell who I'm supposed to shoot when I look at them.*
Teammate 1: *You don't need to look at them, dude. Yo, yo, yo, when you put the aimer on them it turns red. That's how you know.*
Teammate 3: *Nah, it's not red. The thingy turned orange.*
PTOM: *(Quack)*

While thinking about why our third teammate doesn't just shoot when his targeting reticule turns orange, someone killed us. Then we got teabagged, so we had to knock a point off *Killzone 2's* rating. It's a good competitive community, but it can be hard to communicate with so many people clogging up communications with inane comments. Or, you know, quacking.

Call of Duty: World at War

Mode: Team Deathmatch

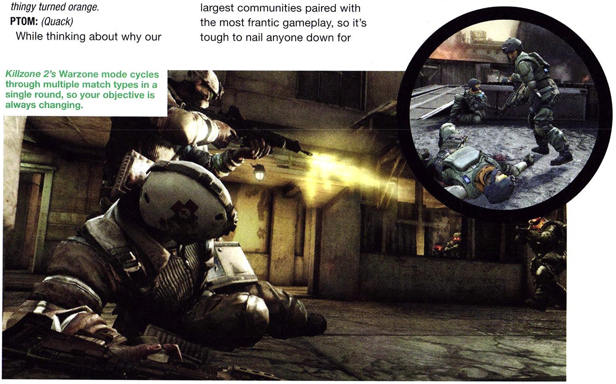
Rating: ☺☺☺

World at War has one of the largest communities paired with the most frantic gameplay, so it's tough to nail anyone down for

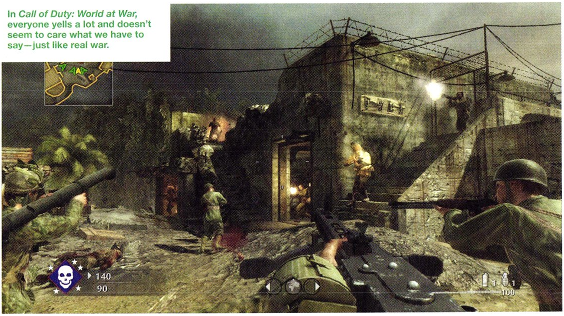
"I'm sorry. It's my mom."

PTOM: Do you have to stop playing?

"No, it's OK, she left."



Killzone 2's Warzone mode cycles through multiple match types in a single round, so your objective is always changing.



In *Call of Duty: World at War,* everyone yells a lot and doesn't seem to care what we have to say—just like real war.

much of a conversation. We did overhear a few interesting gems, though. Like when we tried to offer words of encouragement after a loss…

PTOM: *Alright guys, let's try a little harder this time.*

Teammate 1: *You all suck*

PTOM: *OK then.*

We also met guys like this:

Player: *You know what I love doing? Finding a guy who's already down and—you ever used a shotgun? You just go right up to them and blast them. It goes like all over, boom!*

A typical *CoD: World at War* game is anonymous enough that you get the occasional oddball just trying to get a reaction from you (see the above example), but most people keep to themselves. It might have been nice to have people a bit more willing to work together, but that's what your real-life friends are for.

Street Fighter IV

Mode: Arcade, Ranked Matches

Rating: ☺☺

For *Street Fighter IV,* we turned all the lights down to recreate the poorly lit, sweaty arcades that home consoles were created to replace. Then we warmed up our voices and prepared to taunt our arcade opponents from thousands of mile away. Our first couple encounters were surprisingly unresponsive (and we lost), so we switched to a friendlier approach.

PTOM: *Hey, how are you?*

The Internet: …

PTOM: *Ever played this game before?*

The Internet: …

PTOM: *Yeah, me neither…well, that's cool.*

The Internet: …

[We lose 11 matches in a row]

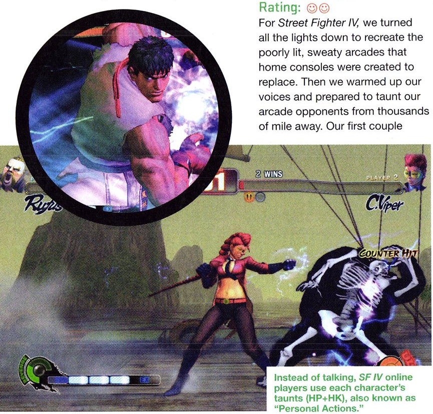
PTOM: *Alright then, I'll see you later.*

The Internet: …

[Player has sent you a friend invitation]

PTOM: *…what?!*

They get a point for the friend request, but *Street Fighter IV* is still missing that key chat element we were looking for: headsets. We spent quite a few hours shuffling from match to match and couldn't find anyone to berate after a super-combo finish, let alone berate *us,* which doesn't make us feel any better.



Instead of talking, *SF IV* online players use each character's taunts (HP+HK), also known as "Personal Actions."

Home

Rating: ☺☺

Fed up with fighting for attention, we logged into Home, where we don't have to try to get noticed because we created a female avatar. These conversations were typed, rather than spoken.

Da_Real_Deal_74: *wat up*

PTOM: *just hanging out*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *can I add u?*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *is it a problem 2 u?*

PTOM: *No, go ahead. Thanks for asking*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *where you from?*

PTOM: *California*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *cool I'm from Chicago*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *it's a dope environment*

PTOM: *What's the dopest part?*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *hangout spots* n*****, *got so many things to do around here*

At this point Da_Real_Deal_74 sent a message to our inbox that simply said, "finally another black person." We pondered what prompted this presumptuous assumption as another new friend joined the conversation.

DaeDae89: *yo she yo gf?*

Da_Real_Deal_74: *naw I was checkin her out LOL*

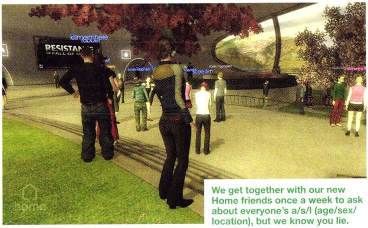
DaeDae89: *o*

DaeDae89: *she kool*

Wow, what a friendly community. The only drawback is that we couldn't shake the feeling we were talking to our creepy neighbor who only wears sweatpants and smells like tuna fish.

The next day, we found this friendship-affirming message in our inbox:

Da_Real_Deal_74: *hey got a pic?* ■



We get together with our new Home friends once a week to ask about everyone's a/s/l (age/sex/location), but we know you lie.

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The Official Magazine

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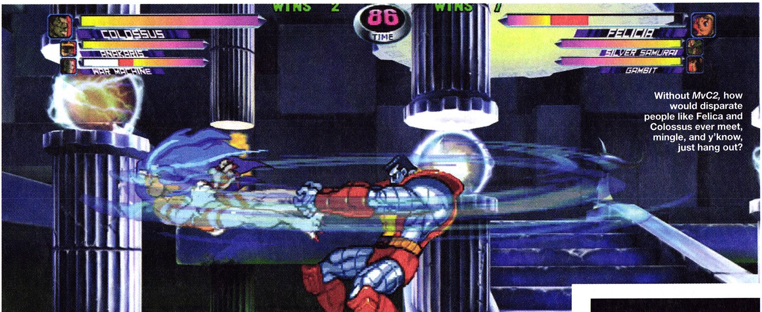
PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of a rubbish bin. We say yea or nay

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.



Without *MvC2*, how would disparate people like Felica and Colossus ever meet, mingle, and y'know, just hang out?

Marvel vs. Capcom 2

PRICE: $14.99 **DEVELOPER:** Foundation 9

+ If you missed *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* when it rocked arcades in the year 2000 (or when it was ported to the Dreamcast later that year and re-released on PS2 in 2002), try to imagine the most awesome parts of Japanese culture simultaneously punching you in the face...and liking it. It's bright, chaotic, and ridiculously over-the-top, and as such, it's a total blast to play.

With fast-paced, combo-happy fighting, oversized projectile attacks, and screen-filling Hyper Combos, the gameplay is not only flashy but satisfying, especially for buttonmashers. The simplified four-button controls makes it easy to execute even the most insane moves, but there's also enough substance beneath the style to allow experienced players to dominate—the hallmark of any well-designed fighting game.

The game requires a surprising amount of strategy thanks to its three-on-three format. You can summon your teammates at any time for a quick assisted-attack or you can swap characters entirely, allowing your injured fighters to recover a small amount of health. And with a stunning 56-character roster (which includes the likes of Jill Valentine, Mega Man, and Wolverine), your options for team-selection strategies are practically limitless.

This particular edition of *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* is a direct port of the Dreamcast code, but Capcom has added comprehensive online multiplayer, a few graphics filters, and a helpful "About the Game" text tutorial. The makeover isn't nearly as comprehensive as the one enjoyed by *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* (which is arguably a slightly better purchase), but this game is still well worth playing. Scott Butterworth

CAPTAIN COMMANDO
ROLL
MARROW
WINS 2
72
WINS 0
1 LEVEL
2 LEVEL

Game characters fighting comic book characters fighting... It's all just so ridiculously...Japanese! But great.

Bomberman Ultra

PRICE: $9.99
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft

+ If you don't know how *Bomberman* plays, where the heck have you been the past couple decades? It's so simple—chuck bombs on a gridded board and try to trap enemies in the crossfire—yet so addictive, with its multiplayer emphasis. This version of the game features 14 stages, almost a dozen different game modes (our pick: Zombie, which has you competing to "paint" the grid with your bombs), and unlockable costumes. Though to be honest, the outfit choices aren't a real draw—you can run around as an angel or a pirate, but uh, why? Buy it for the classic gamplay, and battle locally (up to four players) or online (up to eight). Teresa Dun

Battlefield 1943

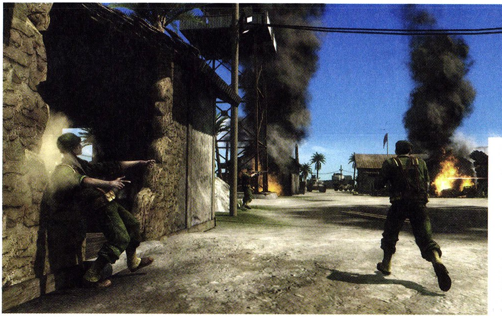
PRICE: $14.99 **DEVELOPER:** DICE

+ World War II is not over for gamers despite other franchises going modern. EA's DICE studio has perfected the team-based multiplayer combat formula over years, refining its initial PC release so that this jump to PSN showcases only the well-trodden, well-executed maps and gameplay types. Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Wake Island are the three maps available in the initial release, on which you'll battle as the U.S. or Imperial Japanese Navy for control of key command posts.

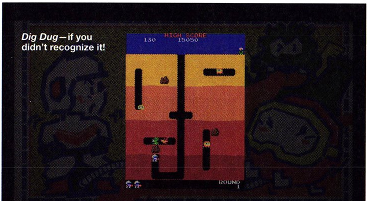
You enter battle as one of three class types: infantry, scout, and rifleman, each with a special weapon or skill (like a bazooka for taking out tanks or sniper rifle for sitting in a nest and picking off enemies). You can jump into any vehicle, from jeeps to tanks to planes, and man static guns and air defense artillery. You know, it's like *Warhawk,* but in World War II.

The battles rage around command posts that you must capture and hold, and the maps are expertly designed to create great balance and flow. They're not too large, so with a full complement of 24 players (12 per side) it won't take long to find an enemy. You earn points for your team for kills and for achieving map objectives, with special events like calling in air attacks adding to your arsenal. The pick-up-and-play action is easy enough for beginners, but like all games of this ilk, it helps if you're playing alongside (or against) real friends.

Rob Smith



In our playtest shortly before release, the servers ran pretty smoothly, though we noticed a few delays between pulling the trigger on the bazooka and the rocket arriving at its target.

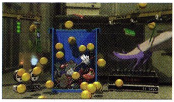


Dig Dug—if you didn't recognize it!

What's in Store?

Five classic games for $9.99? Plus Trophy support, leaderboards, and unlockable PlayStation Home rewards (including playable arcade stands to place in your apartment)? Namco sure knows how to bundle a package. What's that's you say? We haven't told you which games will be included? Well here they are. Eat your heart out, arcade fans. (Play trial versions of these games and unlock other rewards in the new Namco Home space.)

- → ***Pac-Man***
- → ***Galaga***
- → ***Dig Dug***
- → ***Dragon Spirit***
- → ***Xevious***
- → ***Xevious: Resurrection*** (a brand new, re-imagined, HD version of *Xevious)*

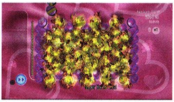


Trash Panic

PRICE: $4.99
DEVELOPER: SONY JAPAN STUDIO

− A *Tetris*-style puzzle game about destroying the world's garbage isn't going to save the earth, sorry. But like attempting to solve the real world's eco-problems, *Trash Panic* is unintuitive, tedious, and at times, frustratingly tough. Sure, the graphics are shiny and you experience some genuinely satisfying moments—a perfectly timed explosion that burns up all your trash right before the bin overflows, for example—but we found the overall gameplay too repetitive to be enjoyable.

Teresa Dun

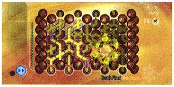


Droplitz

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** BLITZ ARCADE

− Hi-def graphics add sparkle to this otherwise ordinary puzzler. Guide drops of liquid to safety by rotating pieces on a board—the more complicated and interconnected your paths, the better. It's a fun game, with several similar modes and a sprinkling of easy trophies, but at $9.99, it's on the pricey side.

Teresa Dun



PSN REVIEWS

Don't... DON'T bring a knife to a Hitler fight.

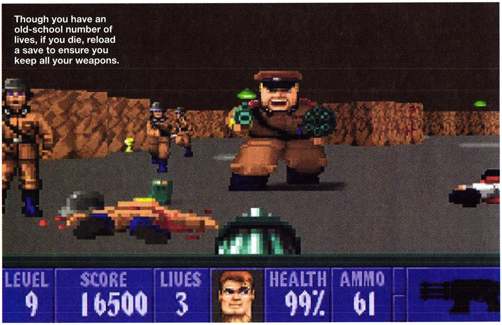
Wolfenstein 3D

PRICE: $4.99 **DEVELOPER:** ID SOFTWARE

− This is unfair. Painfully unfair. Each letter I type gets more painful as it forms the sentence I am compelled to write. *Wolfenstein 3D,* the classic id Software shooter that helped start the first-person shooter revolution <must…pause…> just doesn't hold up very well. Okay, it's out there, breathe...relax.

The remake now available for download on the PlayStation Network is impressively faithful to the original PC game. It has a save-anywhere mechanic, authentic graphics, and the stylized, memorable, guttural yells of the Nazi soldiers stumbling across escaped hero B.J. Blazkowicz—"gushtoffel," "himmel" or so they phonetically sound. But the square shapes of the corridors and rooms, the occasionally nonsensical level design, and eventual tedium of rubbing against every inch of wall in search of the secret rooms makes me sad I took this trip down memory lane. Personally, as a fully paid up id fanboy, *Wolf 3D* was one of the greats that got me into gaming on my 386 SX33 PC. But the nostalgia trip was over by the time I'd finished the first of Castle Wolfenstein's seven levels. It's surprisingly challenging, too, despite a very tight control scheme that works wonderfully on the PS3 controller.

So it falls in a weird place. Intriguing, but likely disappointing to gaming veterans and newbies alike. But it is only $4.99. And you do get to kill Hitler. Maybe it's worth it just to say you've seen the early stages of first-person shooter creation. Rob Smith



Though you have an old-school number of lives, if you die, reload a save to ensure you keep all your weapons.

8185455
M16
MENU
BOSS

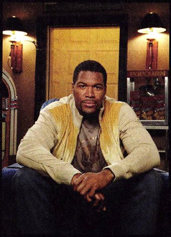
Heavy Weapon: Atomic Tank

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** POPCAP

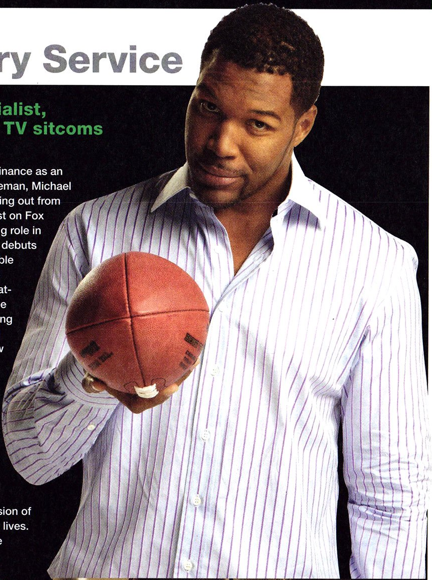
− Of course a tank scooting through a stage called "Tankylvania" would have an atomic missile strapped on its back. In this side-scrolling shooter, the point is to blast jets, missiles, zeppelins, and even giant apes into scrap metal fireworks (and barbequed monkey meat), and what better way to do that than with the mother of all bombs, the nuke? As you progress through the 19 levels of the moderately humorous campaign, you can also tack other weapons onto your tank (the Homing Missile is especially helpful); even so, success requires quick, twitchy reflexes. If that's not you, you won't get past the first half dozen campaign stages or last long in survival mode—let alone unlock the bonus Boss Blitz mode. Throwing other players (up to four total, either local or online) into the mix creates a few minutes of fun mayhem, but if you're not a schmup pro, be warned: you might never even reach the game's halfway point. Teresa Dun

PSN Video Delivery Service

NFL analyst and former sack specialist, Michael Strahan, puts the rush on TV sitcoms



After 15 years dominance as an NFL defensive lineman, Michael Strahan is branching out from his latest gig as an analyst on Fox NFL Sunday into a starring role in his own sitcom. *Brothers* debuts this fall and will be available for download through the PlayStation Store. We chatted with Strahan about the project as he was preparing for the upcoming football season with his NFL show team in Montana.



PTOM: How did the show come about? Post-NFL did you just decide that you wanted to be the new Seinfeld?
MS: [Laughs] Wow, I need to be Seinfeld. I never thought of it like that. I hope we get to some of that kind of success, that would be great.

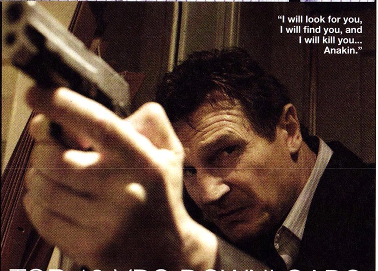
Was the show written specifically for you?
It wasn't necessarily written for me, but it started as an extension of myself and [co-star] Daryl "Chill" Mitchell, an extension of our lives. With Chill now in a wheelchair [the result of a 2001 motorcycle accident] the show covers that, what that's like, and our lives.

Did you have a say in the casting of the other characters [CCH Pounder *(The Shield)* plays his mother and Carl "Apollo Creed" Weathers, his father]?
Before we approached the network I had a relationship with Chill, so we've been in it together from the beginning. As for everyone else, we were asked who we liked, and when CCH came up it was a bit of a surprise because you're so used to seeing her in dramatic roles…but it shouldn't have been a surprise because she's great in whatever she does. And Carl Weathers was the perfect fit for playing my father who's losing it a bit. The way the mother is controlling, well, my mother's not quite like that, but my dad has been losing it forever [laughs]. It does feel like I'm from a different planet some times when I'm back home with the family, looking around.

Will there be guest appearances from your friends from the world of football?
Yeah, definitely, I'll pull in friends from football and other actors I know, and people from baseball and basketball. I'll be calling in quite a few favors to get people in to check it out and have a good time.

What would make you prouder, the 2008 Super Bowl victory or winning an Emmy for *Brothers?*
Oh, if I got an Emmy… Ooh, and an Oscar too, let's throw that in, that would be incredible… I can't even start imaging that. But I'd prepare like I did for the Super Bowl, to just go out with no expectations and have a good time with it.

Photo Credit: Sony Pictures Television / Patrick Ecclesine



"I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you… Anakin."

TOP 10 VDS DOWNLOADS

- ***Taken***
- ***The Curious Case of Benjamin Button***
- ***The Uninvited***
- ***Twilight***
- ***Family Guy* Season 7**
- ***UFC Fights* Season 1**
- ***Deadliest Warrior* Season 1**
- ***Terminator Salvation: The Machinima Series* Season 1**
- ***Heroes* Season 3**
- ***Fanboys***

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Haterade, and Dog Pee

9

Number of hours spent in meetings this issue

19

Number of doodles Scott drew during these meetings

4

Number of items Rob threw at Scott for doodling

SNAAAAKE!!!

I just learned from an annoying Xbox-owning person that there will be a *Metal Gear Solid* releasing for the Xbox 360. I did not believe him at first, so I went home and searched the Interwebs for this so called *Metal Gear Solid: Rising.* As soon as I saw the headline on Konami's website, my heart stopped. I completely flipped out and broke a lamp (by accident). I cannot believe that Konami is going to do this. The PlayStation gave birth to this awesome, pwning saga of a game, and now they are just going to betray us like that. Not to mention the fact that now we will get even more crap from people that have the 360. The game has not even been released and people I know are asking me, "What games aren't for the Xbox now?" I mean come on. Really?!

Matt Solari, via email

We like *Metal Gear Solid* too, Matt, but if you're breaking lamps and throwing around words like "betray," you might want to take a deep breath and reprioritize a little. Konami is a company, and companies exist for exactly one reason: to make money. Sad, but true. This isn't a matter of loyalty; it's just business. And if it makes you feel any better, *MGS: Rising* is also coming to the PS3, and it's been reported that Hideo Kojima will actually be focusing most of his attention on the PSP-exclusive *MGS: Peace Walker* (see page 16).

XBOT CONFESSIONAL

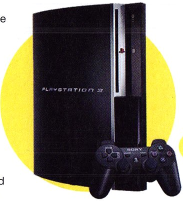
I just received the July issue of PTOM in the mail today, and I immediately flipped to the back like I always do. I couldn't help but laugh at the letter from "UpgradeCade" because another one of his letters got published in a certain other magazine, praising them for not acting like fanboys and not saying bad things about other consoles. I don't own a PS3, PSP, or PS2; I own an Xbox 360. I love my 360 and wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I just find the whole "Xbot" thing extremely humorous. It doesn't bother me in the least, which makes me wonder why it bothers other Xbox 360 owners so much.

Bob, via email

Wait, you don't even own a PlayStation console?! Proving what an awesome mag PTOM is if you still subscribe. Good job us!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

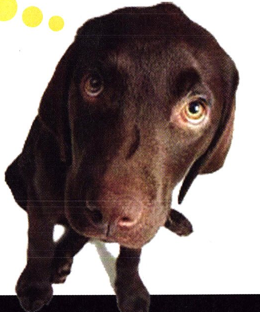
PS PEE



Hey there PTOM, do I have an unusual story for you! My wife and I have two housedogs: a Chihuahua named Buddy and a Chihuahua/Pug named Roscoe (who we recently adopted). With a new dog in the house, I could tell Buddy was getting very jealous. He hated Roscoe. I figured they'd become friendly in no time, but instead, Buddy began to retaliate and started doing things he knows not to do…like marking his territory in our house. My wife—being the OCD cleaning freak she is—was wigging out. So we punished Buddy and for a time everything calmed down...or so we thought. Until one day when my wife was dusting, she noticed my PS3 was wet, so she lifted it up, revealing a large puddle of urine. My PS3 had been doused in dog pee! That's when I started wigging out. But to my surprise, my PS3 was unharmed and worked fine! As the weeks went by, the dogs got over their differences and have begun playing with one another. My wife, me, and the PS3 can relax now. My praise to Sony for making such a durable product that can even withstand the effects of dog pee.

Jesse, via email

That's simultaneously disgusting and awesome, and needless to say, we're glad your PS3 survived. But how did you punish Buddy? Did you make him play *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust?*



> "One day when my wife was dusting, she noticed my PS3 was wet, so she lifted it up, revealing a large puddle of urine. My PS3 had been doused in dog pee!" >>

SPACED OUT

What do you think PTOM would look like if you switched backspace with the \ key? i woul\\\\\\\\\ I would write\\\\\\ tu\ype like this.\\\\ THIS <<<,</\\\. HAHAHA!!

Mikey, via email

That's an interesting premise, Mikey, but we can assure that PTOM would look exactly the same as it does now because we never, ever make mistkaes.

WE ALSO INVENTED THE INTERNET

I've been a gamer since I was little, playing *Super Mario Bros.* with my dad on the NES. Well, I just recently sat my dear ol' dad down and we watched a video on YouTube—specifically the *Assassin's Creed 2* E3 trailer—and I asked my dad, "Is this real or a videogame?" His jaw dropped; he was in awe that it took him until halfway through the trailer to realize that this is what gaming has become. Truly memorable and stunning. Thank you!

Justin, via email

Um, we had nothing to with the *Assassin's Creed 2* trailer being awesome, but you're welcome! Now if only more old folks like your dad could witness the brilliance of videogames, maybe a few of the more popular misconceptions would start to disappear.

Why bother visiting Venice when you can just enjoy it virtually...as an assassin! Sure beats the real-life "educational" guided tour.

INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY ROBBERY

I was downloading a *Resident Evil 5* wallpaper and noticed that it was around one MB in size. For some reason, it struck something into my head. I looked back at my older downloads and saw that the *Street Fighter* costume packs I paid around $20 for (each of the five costume packs was $3.99) were around 100 to 200 KB in size. WHAT IN THE &#$@ING HELL CAPCOM?! HOW IS YOUR HD WALLPAPER OVER A MB BUT A "COSTUME PACK" IS LESS THAN A QUARTER MB?! I read before about DLC that nickel-and-dime gamers for "unlock codes" for content that's already on the game disc. First they screw us over by making us pay for content the game comes with, then also JUST SO HAPPEN to release all the costumes on separate days in individual packs. All I've got to say is @#$% YOU CAPCOM! I &*^#ING LOVE YOUR GAMES, BUT %$^& YOU, YOU CHEAP $#!@ING @&%HOLES!!!

Brian, via email

Wow, OK, deep breathe Brian. First of all, no one is making you buy anything. The costumes have absolutely no impact on the gameplay, so your decision to spend that $20 was entirely your own. Next, have you already forgotten that shortly after *Street Fighter IV* came out, Capcom released the Championship Mode Expansion Pack—which added features like the ability to save replays and improved tournament matchmaking—for free. Last, it's possible that the extra costumes were already on the disc, but that's why you have to be a discerning consumer and vote with your wallet. The best way to not be exploited is to not spend your money. Game companies will get the message.

ONE OF THESE IS NOT LIKE THE OTHERS

Please please please persuade Sony to announce it's next lineup of Greatest Hits! It seems like it's taking forever! *Assassin's Creed* and *Fight Night Round 3* were great and, above all, affordable! $29.99 is the sweet spot for me, and there are plenty of older games that got overlooked that would attract me and other gamers. Here are a few examples: *Battlefield: Bad Company*, *Hail to the Chimp*, *Resistance 2*, *Call of Duty 4*. What do you think, PTOM?

Dustin., via email

Actually, Dustin, SCEA has already launched it's second round of Greatest Hits titles (and *Bad Company* is one of 'em). But far more importantly, *Hail to the Chimp?* Are you serious?!

Monkey-see, monkey-do, monkey-videogame poo.

ENOUGH ALREADY!

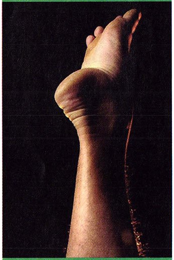
I was reading your magazine looking for the letter I sent last month when I noticed one about not hating Xbox 360! You should talk bad about Xbox more. People who say that Xbox is better are either too embarrassed to admit they wasted their money on the most useless plastic box in history or something doesn't

Overheard this month in the PTOM offices:

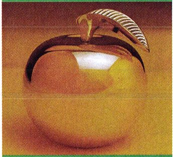
"No, the other E3."

Greek Geek

Our July issue Reviews intro page contest was one of the trickiest yet, but fortunately for us Classics nerds, someone was clever enough to crack our *God of War*-inspired puzzle. Congratulations, Thomas Benefield! Expect to reap the rewards of your efforts soon. For the rest of you, check out his answers below and good luck with this month's puzzler.



"The first photo is of the Achilles tendon…



The second photo is of a golden apple…

And the third is of the Eiffel Tower, an iconic landmark in Paris, France.

They all have the Trojan War (and the *Iliad)* in common, Achilles being the Achaean hero, Paris a Prince of Troy, who awarded the Golden Apple to Aphrodite, which in effect brought about the Trojan War."

work properly between their ears. PS3 FTW!!!!!

Aaron, via email

You know, Aaron, just because you love your PlayStation doesn't mean you have to hate the Xbox. Instead of being all negative and focusing on putting other people down, why not just celebrate the thing that you love? Besides, Xbox owners are fragile creatures. Like Canadians. [Oy, not that again. *–Ed.]*

ASKING FOR TROUBLE

I just wanted to tell you guys that I appreciate it when you really stick it to people who write stupid letters. Like the guy who ragged on *Dante's Inferno* in your June issue. You made him look dumb for 1) being a Negative Nancy and 2) being a fake know-it-all. I also really enjoyed when you told the person off in your July issue who complained about the "Bad guys you didn't want to kill" ad. Keep up the good work of keeping people in line.

Jason Gradwohl, via email

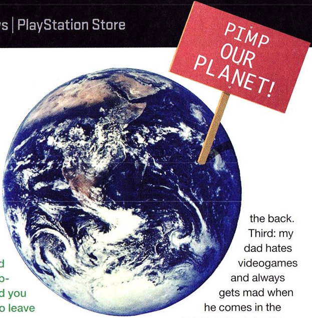
To be fair, the deck is sort of stacked in our favor. We have the luxury of being able to carefully select which letters we answer. So really, we're just bullies. But hey, at least we're entertaining bullies, right?

ISSUE ISSUES

I was just curious if there was a valid reason why the latest issue of PTOM is available on the newsstands sometimes one to two weeks before I receive mine in the mail? I figured the people that plunked down the subscription fee would have first dibs on the new issues.

Eric, Chicago IL

Subscription issues are distributed over the course of several weeks, so depending on a variety of factors—including where you live and how much your mail carrier dislikes you—you could receive your issues anywhere from two weeks before to two weeks after the newsstand date. It's nothing personal! Plus, even though you might have to wait a little longer to get the most recent issue, you've already saved money by subscribing…and you barely have to leave your couch!



PIMP OUR PLANET!

EARTH? BOOORING!

Is there a way to add more visual effects to Life with PlayStation or when the PS3 is playing music? I'm as big a fan of the planet as anyone but enough is enough!

Joe Oliver, via email

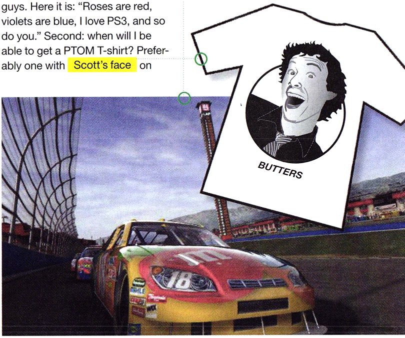
Oh, so a breathable atmosphere and the miracle of life just aren't cutting it anymore, huh? You want, like, rainbow strobe lights and crazy lasers and fog and stuff? Wait…that actually sounds really cool. We need to convince Sony to pimp our planet, now!

ASK PTOM

First of all, I wrote a poem for you guys. Here it is: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I love PS3, and so do you." Second: when will I be able to get a PTOM T-shirt? Preferably one with Scott's face on the back. Third: my dad hates videogames and always gets mad when he comes in the house and see's me playing my PS3. I don't play it all the time and he very rarely watches TV (other than NASCAR on Sundays), so I'm not stopping him from watching anything. What can I do to make him not hate videogames or make him not get mad when he sees me playing them?

Aaron Wecker, via email

Thanks for the lovely poem, and though your request for a shirt branded with Scott's face is a bit…disturbing, we'll see what we can do. As for your dad, sounds like you might be able to slowly indoctrinate him into the world of videogames using EA's *NASCAR 09*. And the latest *Gran Tursimo 5* trailer revealed



contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. We tried to get some at E3, but the greedy fanboys got to 'em first.

NASCAR stock cars in the forthcoming game! Appeal to his interests, you know? And here's a Pro Tip: Let the Daddy win.

PLAYSTATION COMMUNICATION

Is PTOM truly associated with Sony PlayStation? I ask because I'm a bit surprised that you don't have a PTOM forum on the PlayStation website. The Official Xbox mag has a forum on the Xbox site, and I know from reading that mag that they collect a lot of feedback from the forum. It would just make sense to put a PTOM forum on the PlayStation site.

MYTOYZ2, via email

We really work with Sony not for Sony, so it's not entirely surprising that we don't have our own forum on their site. But we are actively working that out with SCEA as you read this.

UM...WHAT?

Quit bitching about slipped release dates for new games. Hey, it happens! This is software. You want the new product and you want it to be perfect, and if it's not, you'll SLAM it big time. Perfection takes time. If you want it bad, you'll get it bad. I learned the hard way to never believe a sales or marketing agent. When game company XYZ says its game will be released xx/xx/xx, you don't actually believe them, do you? To hear PTOM, you want games released like Microsoft: half finished, let the user debug for you, and put out daily updates that have to be downloaded. Get over it and move on.

Herb Barry, via email

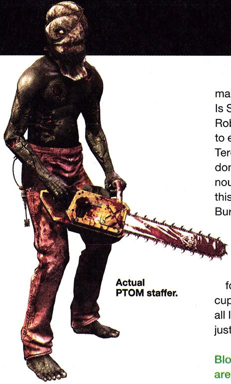
Wait a minute...when have we ever complained about a game being released later than expected? Is this some kind of clever game in which you concoct imaginary complaints? Ok, let's try it: Herb, you really need to stop leaving your shoes in the middle of the room. Seriously, just take them off and leave them by the door. See? We can make stuff up too!

I, ZOMBIE

How come you guys never really talk about yourselves? How do we know that you run this magazine and aren't just bloodthirsty zombies who are learning our addresses so they can invade our homes and eat our children?

Selena, VA

We'll have you know that zombies aren't nearly this articulate, nor are they conniving enough to pull off such a scheme. We're actually werewolves.



Actual PTOM staffer.

QUIT CALLING US NAMES!

I was reading your good ol' magazine that I have subscribed to for a good two years or so now when I noticed all of the last names you have. Smith: what kind of last name is Smith? That's a name you pick when you have to make up a last name on the spot! Is Smith even your last name, Mr. Rob Smith?! And do I even need to explain your last name, Ms. Teresa Dun? Bousquet: well, I don't even know how to pronounce this name, so...yeah. Ruiz: this is too common of a last name. Burchill: this sounds like the name of a tree...where the tree branches are growing out your face. Butterworth: well this just makes me hungry for some Reese's peanut butter cups or some syrup. Well, that's all I have. Love your magazine and just joking with all of you!

Jacob Blockland, via email

Blockland: more like blockhead, are we right?

BOOST YOUR GPA WITH LBP

A few months ago, I had to do a science project about making an extreme environment vehicle. Since everyone else was drawing their vehicles, I decided, "Why don't I do something different?" Guess what? I used *LittleBigPlanet* to do the project. I made a level about the vehicle and presented it to the whole class. Everyone was jealous. The best part was, I got an A.

Jensen Tung, via email

Well done Jensen, you're officially our hero! But now you have to do all our homework.

See YOUR Letter in PTOM!

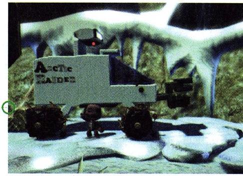
We get a lot of letters here at PTOM, but unfortunately, not all of them are fit to print. However, by simply utilizing the following simple tips, you can dramatically improve your chances of appearing in our pages! So read up and then send us your best shot. Fame and fortune await!

DO

- Be concise and to the point.
- Use proper spelling and grammar.
- Be thoughtful, funny, and unique.

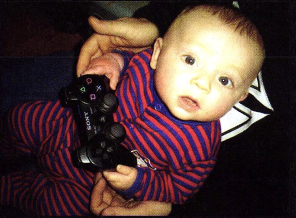
DON'T

- Ask for release dates of specific games.
- Explain to us why the PS3 is better than the 360.
- Write to just tell us to put your letter in the mag.

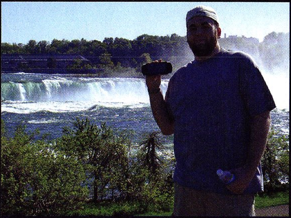


Jensen's "Arctic Raider" AKA "Project A."

More babies! More PSPs!



Reader DJ Neill recently had a kid! He tells us: "My son, at only seven months old, is already becoming a PlayStation addict. Here's a picture of him playing the new *UFC* game. Gaming is a hobby that runs very strongly through our family." Congrats on the kid, DJ. He's only the third baby to appear in PTOM...this is fast becoming a trend.



Reader Jesse didn't have a kid, but he did go to *gasp* Canada. "I went to Niagara Falls and Canada recently. Of course I took my PSP along and got a few pics. I also visited Canada playing the role of ambassador between U.S. gamers and Canadian gamers. There is some hostility between the two as you know. I did my best to convince the Canadians that we did not hate them. Although they did say AYE a lot."

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Qore host Veronica Belmont

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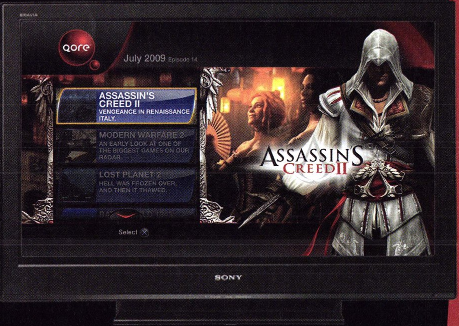
Featuring Assassin's Creed 2, Modern Warfare 2, Lost Planet 2, and Battlefield 1943



qore

July 2009 Episode 14

ASSASSIN'S CREED II
VENGEANCE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY.

MODERN WARFARE 2
AN EARLY LOOK AT ONE OF THE BIGGEST GAMES ON OUR RADAR.

LOST PLANET 2
HELL WAS FROZEN OVER, AND THEN IT THAWED.

With the amount of money spent on development these days, it isn't surprising that most companies stick with tried and true franchises. That's not necessarily a bad thing. After all, if it ain't broke, why fix it? Many of our favorite PlayStation 3 franchises return this fall, so the Qore team got up close and personal with a slew of sequels readying for holiday season prime time.

Renaissance Man

The action/adventure game that focused on simulated ancestral memories now shifts locales to Renaissance Italy in *Assassin's Creed 2.* Audrey Cleo investigates the new tale of power, revenge, and conspiracy that lets you put Leonardo Da Vinci's inventions to good use.

Special Ops

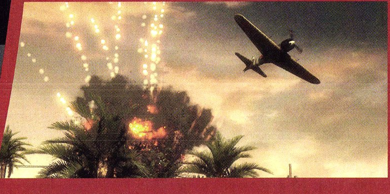
Acclaimed developer Infinity Ward returns to the *Call of Duty* franchise with a direct sequel to 2007's smash hit *Modern Warfare.* So how do you make one of the most popular games of this current generation even better? Add snowmobiles, of course (No kidding)!

Hell, (Un)frozen Over

Ten years after the events of *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition,* the ice and snow have finally melted—but that doesn't make the planet any more hospitable! Capcom shows Veronica how players can team up to take down the enormous Akrid.

Sky, Land, and Sea

The popular PC franchise is coming to the PlayStation Network in the form of *Battlefield 1943*—a fast-paced online shooter with multiple vehicles, 24-player combat, and environmental destruction in WWII Pacific theater locales.



Plus

Don't forget to look for a new mini-game in the Qore Arcade as well as your very own fireworks launcher to help celebrate Independence Day in a safe and sane manner.

Stage: 1
Score: 2
Chain Bonus
50 X 5 = 250
+10

Photograph by Mark Madeo

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